



MASTER HUNTER

K

BOOK 02

From Hell

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Master Hunter K

(마스터헌터K)

by

From Hell

(프롬헬)

Synopsis

Without warning, every man, woman, and child were teleported off to fight an endless series of battle 'to prove the worth of their species with their own power.'

Failure to clear every objective means that humanity shall be purged, or so the Operator claims.

But if that is true, why was K sent back in time?

Copyright © by Lisa Hayes

All rights reserved.

English Translation by Gamja @ [OppaTranslations](#)

Translation Edit by No.1 Oppa @ [OppaTranslations](#)

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ [Hasseno Blog](#)

This is a free eBook. You are free to give it away (in unmodified form) to whomever you wish.

No part of this eBook may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Chapter 101 – Red Dragon's Lair (7)

The hunters fell silent after the second hint. The first one had been confusing enough, but the second one was even more obscure. But the pale faced 'Royal Ranger' raised his hand and said

"Excuse me..."

Sungjin pointed at him like an instructor at school.

"Yes, please speak your mind."

The Ranger glanced around before opening his mouth.

"I don't know about the hidden boss... but I think I understand where the hidden piece might be located. First hint is the Red Path. I believe this indicates that we should follow the lava flow. Since there's nothing red here except lava."

Everyone nodded.

"Second, a place only he could go, I think this also indicates something that has to do with lava. Because of its size... it's ridiculous to think we can't go anywhere that the dragon can go otherwise. If you have to move through Lava to get to it, it would be difficult indeed to get through it unless you were the dragon."

A likely explanation.

"Finally, cooling the heated wings... I think this is the key. His wings became heated. In other words, it is a place where lava could drip onto its wings."

At his words, everyone exclaimed

"Ohh..."

"He's right"

Sungjin let the part about the hidden boss slide for now and said

"I feel that the Royal Ranger's deduction is probably right. Then let's go and try to find this hidden piece."

Hidden boss needed the consent of everyone present anyhow.

“Ok.”

“Let’s do that.”

Sungjin glanced at the Immortal. The Immortal stepped forward when he noticed Sungjin look at him.

“Ok let us go.”

The Hunters followed the slow flowing Lava while cleaning up the mobs. Half of them were killed by the Master Hunter and his giant Wolf, but there were no complaints.

The monsters were difficult enough to kill with 9 of them working together. Although an outrageous percentage of contribution point was flowing towards the Master Hunter, the hunters did not raise a word in complaint. They must have thought to themselves

‘He is just that kinda guy.’

After a long search through the tunnels, they arrived at a large open space which was slightly smaller than the Dragon’s main chamber.

The most eye-catching feature of this open space was the slow moving lava fall. It was quite a distance away, but even from this point, it looked intensely hot and uninviting.

But when Sungjin was looking at it, he recalled the Royal Ranger’s words.

‘Red path, only he could pass... and heated wings.’

And this open space was quite suspicious. It was a very wide open space, yet not a single monster could be found nearby. Sungjin moved closer to the lava fall. As he moved closer, he felt the unbearable heat against his face.

Sungjin ignored the heat the best he could and approached the

lava fall. The size of the fall could possibly just barely accommodate a dragon. No, perhaps it was slightly smaller.

‘...it is said that a Dragon is capable of transforming into human form...’

Sungjin thought about closely inspecting the immediate area around the lava fall; The source of the lava, the pool where the lava landed, and the lake of lava where the lava from the fall slowly flowed.

But then he noticed strange fragments close to one of the walls. They were slightly different from one another, but they were similar enough. Once the hunters realized Sungjin had found something, they started gathering behind him one by one.

“What’s that...?”

Sungjin stared at it intensely. And soon, he came to understand the source of the fragments.

“Those are... footprints.”

Someone asked

“Footprints?”

Sungjin explained to them

“Yes, footprints. They look like broken fragments... but its debris is left from stepping on lava and then stepping back off of it. Those are footprints that were left behind as the lava cooled.”

The others were impressed by Sungjin’s swift understanding of the situation.

“Oh, you must be right!”

“That means...”

The others followed the fragments with their eyes. The footprints led to the lava, like a red path. Just as the hint said, it was most definitely the red path they were looking for.

The hunters continued to follow the footprints further on. The red path, as expected, ended up inside the Lava Fall.

“There?”

“Ehh...”

Upon closer inspection, the footprints could be seen going up the side of the Lava Fall, and suddenly stopping half way up.

“Behind the lava fall... there must be a hollow space...”

“It looks like something only a Dragon can enter for sure.”

“I can see why a dragon’s wings might have gotten heated.”

“But how can we go there?”

That was the main problem. First, flight must be a possibility. It would be impossible to even approach the Lava fall without a way to fly. Second, they had to deal with the immensely hot lava falling from above.

Being touched by the lava would melt the body before they could reach the treasure trove. Sungjin looked down upon the Ring of Chimerao. If he used it, it could make him immune to the Lava.

‘If I can enter there within 5 seconds...’

But this method had its own problem as well. First was the flying carpet. It had minimal magical protection on it as a raid reward item. But if it was damaged, he would be unable to use it for the rest of the chapter. And coming back out of the Lava fall would become an issue.

He could possibly just wait for the cool down on the Ring of Chimerao to refresh, but if the carpet were to fail mid-flight, he could fall into the lake of lava and perish there.

Dying like that after finally defeating the dragon was definitely undesirable.

‘What should I do?’

Sungjin stood before the Lava Fall and considered his options while the rest of the hunters were silently standing still.

No one could think of anything to do. But watching from afar would solve nothing. Sungjin decided to just take out the carpet and check the lava fall from above.

He then moved to the side of the Lava Fall to take a look inside and spotted a hollow space beyond the Lava.

‘This must be the right spot...’

But the space between the lava and the opening was too small; just wide enough for someone to fit their arms through.

The wide carpet, as well its rider Sungjin, would not be able to fit through there.

‘And I can’t go in sideways either...’

Sungjin decided to check from above. Beyond the fall, the lava was slowly flowing downward. Sungjin flew above the flowing river.

Even though it was called a ‘fall’, the flow of the lava was not rapid due to its viscosity.

Sungjin watched the flow for a moment. Now that he thought of it, he recalled his fights against the Magma Golem earlier.

‘Frostbite’

The Golems hit by the spell would rapidly cool and slow down.

‘...What if...?’

Sungjin raised his hands towards the fall and chanted a spell along with Besgoro.

“Binding Frost! Frostbite!”

“Binding Frost! Frostbite!”

Two blasts of spells were fired from Sungjin’s head and hands. And slowly, little by little, the fall hardened.

Once the spell came to an end, the Lava had completely hardened up. The flow of Lava followed the newly formed edge, and the width of the lava fall had decreased

Sungjin directed the magic carpet to return to the side of the fall. The gap which was previously only large enough to fit a human hand was now large enough for a man to pass through.

‘It’s a success, you smart bastard.’

Besgoro shouted in glee. But it was still dangerous. Sungjin rode the magic carpet back down to the rest of the hunters and asked the ‘Blue Magician’

“Hey, you. You know how to use frostbite, right?”

He had asked Sungjin earlier how high his Magic power was. He must have known how to gauge the strength of Sungjin’s spell because he also knew the spell. As Sungjin expected,

“Yes, I know how to use it, Master Hunter.”

“Please get on.”

Sungjin made space on the carpet. The carpet was only large enough to carry two adults. Once Sungjin had the Blue Magician on the carpet, he took him back up to the lava fall.

The hardened lava was still there, but it wouldn’t last very long and would eventually melt again. Sungjin told the Blue Magician

“We are going to use magic to harden the lava here which will further reduce the width of the fall. You understand right?”

“Yes, I watched you do it.”

“Ok.”

Once Sungjin was done speaking to him, he cast the spell together with him.

“Binding Frost! Frostbite!”

He used the spell to harden the edge of the lava flow.

[Warning: Low mana]

Sungjin who had cast his spell until he was drained out of mana thought

‘This should be enough’

And returned to the side of the lava fall. The width of the cascading lava had shrunk even further. The empty space hidden behind the lava was now fully visible.

It was now large enough to freely fly into the hole. Sungjin looked back at the others.

“I think we can pass through here now. Anyone who can fly...”

Even before he finished his sentence, the other eight hunters

“Power to defy Gravity, Levitation!”

Used magic to float into the sky

“To me, Adaram”

Summoned a giant eagle

“Sky Walking”

Or used active items to step into the air. One or two hunters were unable to fly, but they were helped by the others around them and approached the Lava fall.

‘I see... these people made it this far for a reason.’

Sungjin thought as he entered the opening first. Inside of the opening was a much larger, wide open space. It was a space nearly as large as the Dragon’s main chamber.

This chamber contained an unimaginable quantity of gold and treasures. He had seen a similar view in the Magician’s Ivory Tower, but this was on a completely different scale altogether.

If the Ivory Tower’s room was something of a ‘Treasure room’, this was akin to ‘A Mountain of Treasure’.

The 'Blue Magician's' mouth dropped.

"My goodness..."

Sungjin didn't show it, but he too was surprised.

'What an absurd amount.'

Sungjin picked a suitable spot to land and lowered the carpet. The place he stepped on was a mound of gold. Sungjin thought to himself

'His hobby was rolling all over the treasure? I can certainly see why.'

The hunters who followed from behind stared at the room with bloodshot eyes. And several people tried to shovel the gold into their cubes but were sorely disappointed.

Sungjin picked up one of the gold coins lying around. The sparkling gold contained an image of a man's face. He had a large nose but a full beard. A portrait of a slightly skinny man.

Judging from the crown, it must be the portrait of the king. Above the image were unrecognizable words of an unknown language.

'Hmm... is this the face of this world's king?'

Sungjin checked another coin. But this time, there was a different portrait.

The man had worn a similar crown, but unlike the previous image, he had curly hair, a flat nose, and a roundish face.

'Ohh...'

Sungjin tried checking several other coins in curiosity. Just from the ones he noticed the differences of, he could see that there were at least ten different individuals.

'So all these coins were collected over different generations... over different eras... taking this back to the human world would...

probably make you unfathomably rich, right?’

Sungjin thought as he put the coins back down on the mound. It was something that he would not be able to take with him.

‘The most important thing is the Hidden Piece.’

Sungjin said to the other Hunters

“You can’t take the gold. But the hidden piece is located somewhere around here, so please search for it.”

Chapter 102 – Red Dragon's Lair (8)

Sungjin and the other hunters began to comb the treasure mountain for the 'Hidden Piece'.

Between the endless amount of gold, there were necklaces filled with diamond, scabbards and swords decorated richly with precious metals and gems, and other eye-catching items, but the hunters steadily lost interest in them.

No matter how decadent the decoration, it was worthless if it wasn't obtainable. And along the way, one of the hunters shouted "H...Here!"

The hunters quickly gathered to where the man had shouted from. There was a gargantuan Treasure Chest, nearly as tall as a grown man.

And embedded on it was a crystal of Amethyst much taller than a man. The chest was placed at the center of the mountain of treasure, like a centerpiece. With a glance, it seemed obvious that it would contain something precious. The hunters surrounded it.

Sungjin watched the scene from the back. One of the hunters stepped forward to try and open the top. But then he turned to ask "Hey... Help me with this."

Sungjin along with everyone gathered up at his request to assist with moving the lid.

"Yiieah!"

With the effort of half a dozen Hunters, and several helping from the side, the lid of the Chest "Boom"

Opened with a loud noise. Everyone looked expectant. But within lay nothing but black stones.

"What is this?"

"What's going on?"

They couldn't contain their disappointment.

Someone even said

“This must not be the Hidden Piece...”

But then the Operator gave an announcement.

[Congratulations. Hidden Piece]

[Dragon Heart Found]

The announcement immediately turned the mood around.

“Dragon Heart?”

“This stone?”

Everyone bent to pick up the stone. Each and everyone checked the Operator's status screen. Sungjin also checked the Screen.

Dragon Heart (Small) – Source of Magic Power

Legendary Crafting Material

Dragon's heart is the Source of all Magic power.

Black stone is the source of mana, the origin of Magic Power.

‘Crafting Material... that means it is possible to make something...’

Sungjin was staring at it when another Hunter's Cube announced
[Congratulations. Legendary Crafting Material]

[Dragon's Heart is obtained.]

No one understood what it was for, but it must be something amazing they all thought. Luckily, there was enough to go around.

‘I was worried there wasn't going to be enough. Would I be able to say I am going to take one anyway? I don't want to give up a hidden piece... but if I insist on one, what will the others say?’

He was worried needlessly. There was enough Black Hearts in the chest for each of the hunters. Sungjin thought to himself ‘It's possible that the Hidden Pieces are designed so only one can be

obtained per Hunter. Since I have never witnessed a fight occur over a Hidden Piece...’

Sungjin thought, but his worry soon came to fruition. He had initially worried about there being too little, but the problem was the opposite. There were too many. After each hunter had picked up one, six more remained on the ground.

It was a Legendary Crafting Material. It could be sold at the auction house for more than 10,000 coins a piece. The hunters very briefly checked each other, but they soon ran in to try and secure a Dragon Heart for themselves. A fierce fighting broke out.

“Move!”

“Get out of my way! You are already holding two!”

“Damn it, get out of the way if you already got another!”

Sungjin watched from the side as the things unfolded. He was unsure how to proceed.

‘What should I do? Should I join the fray? But I don’t want to. However, those are really valuable...’

While he was in a dilemma, the struggle became intensified. Those forced out from the pile of rocks looked like they may even draw weapons.

“You fuckers!”

Sungjin quickly tried to come up with a solution.

‘If someone commits to trolling... what about the hidden boss?’

If even one of them were to die, taking down the Hidden Boss would prove to be difficult. Of course, if a troll were to show up, he would be rewarded, but... Sungjin raised his sword and shouted “STOP!”

Everyone froze in place at his command. Sungjin said to them “Stop for a second.”

He didn't have anything thought of. He was most definitely the strongest of them all, but it was not like he could do as he pleased.

No one could complain if he demanded that he take one or two more. But the limit would be at that. Trying to take more would only buy hatred.

It was possible that the hunters would turn to trolling as a group against him. So he first said to them "Stop for now and let's think of how to distribute the leftovers fairly."

But the problem was solved easier than Sungjin thought. The 'Friar' who was sitting inside of the chest used Sungjin's interruption to try and sneak another one into his cube.

But the Operator gave a warning.

[Only one Hidden piece may be obtained per Hunter.]

All the hunters who had previously wrestled froze in place.

"What?"

The bottom of the 'Friar's' Cube opened up, and the Dragon's Heart landed on the ground letting out a 'Kussss'

An awkward silence passed over the hunters. The mood between party members had been quite good thus far.

Master Hunter Kei: The Hunters accepted his actions despite him taking the lion's share of contribution points.

And when fighting a seemingly insurmountable boss, they had worked together and formed a sense of camaraderie.

But thanks to the fight over the hidden pieces, all of it was ruined. Everyone had turned their backs on their comrades and fought for their self-interest.

The Immortal who had not joined the struggle said "Now now, let's not fight. Take only one. Only one each."

He tried to ease the tension, but it was already too late. More

than one or two were on the verge of committing troll activity. Sungjin grasped his forehead.

‘I won’t be able to suggest the Hidden boss after all.’

Only moments ago, they looked upon the treasure together ‘Wow look at this Emerald crystal’

‘What about this ruby crown? Was it worn by a king?’

They had shared these comments with each other, but now it was completely silent. However, it was at that moment ‘Tsszt’

The space itself above the treasure mountain bent and a person walked out. Everyone’s eyes fell upon the newcomer. The person was a woman.

Red hair and Yellow eyes. Sharp nose and smooth skin, a young lady with breathtaking beauty. After arriving on top of the mountain of treasure, she took a look at her surroundings with a crimson hood over her head. Sungjin thought to himself ‘What? Is she a hunter from another realm?’

But there was no title above her head. In other words, ‘She could be a monster.’

Sungjin thought. So he

‘Sshing!’

Pulled both of his swords out of his scabbards. The other hunters became tense and followed suit in pulling out their weapons.

Meanwhile, the woman in red hood noticed the hunters and slowly walked towards them, stepping over golden coins. Sungjin was watching her in silence, but the Immortal was the first to ask “W...What are you? Who are you?”

She threw a glance his way. Of all the different ways she fulfilled the word ‘perfect beauty’, her shocking yellow eyes were the most eye-catching.

Sungjin stared at her eyes as well. But the iris of her eyes was in a

slit like that of a cat. Sungjin felt a Deja Vu when he looked into those eyes.

‘What is it? I feel like I’ve seen it before... Was it the Basilisk’s eye?’

He had thought. But the answer was closer than he thought. Just before ‘Smell of meat! Human Meat!’

Eyes which looked down upon them. Sungjin realized ‘She has the same eyes as Khal Gal!’

While Sungjin was figuring things out, she reduced the distance between her and the Hunters slowly.

“I said, who are you?”

The Immortal asked once more, but she did not respond as she continued to make her way forward. The hunters began to move away in intimidation. Someone even slipped on the coins and fell.

Meanwhile, she approached the Chest and picked up one of the hearts, whispering “So the rumors were true...”

The hunters watched her. She placed the Dragon Heart back into the Chest and bent over to return the other Dragon Hearts into the chest.

Until this point, the hunters watched without much thought. But after returning all six remaining hearts into the chest, she closed the lid shut with just one slender arm.

The lid which took tremendous effort from half a dozen Hunters. No one at this point believed her to be an ordinary human. Only a monster in human form.

But then she spoke for the first time to them.

“Yo, humans. Are you the ones who killed Khal Gal?”

No one replied. By calling them humans, she had indirectly confirmed that she was not one. She asked again.

“I’ll repeat. Are you the ones who killed Khal Gal?”

She glared at the hunters as she asked. Her gaze looked strong enough to kill a weak hearted man. One of the hunters replied meekly “Yes...”

The one who replied was the Barbarian. He was also surprised that he replied, and closed his mouth with his hands in shock. It seemed like the strength of her intimidating gaze was enough to compel a truthful answer. The hunters became tense.

They were afraid of her reaction. But she then responded with “Oh really?”

She then placed one hand on the chest and said

“Move”

And the chest disappeared in an instant. The other hunters thought ‘Is it an active skill?’

But Sungjin looked at her and asked

“Excuse me... are you... A dragon like Khal Gal?”

She turned to look at him. Her eyes were exactly the same as the Dragon’s.

“Yes, Khal Gal is the Son I bore.”

All the hunters tensed up even further. Just now

‘Are you the ones that murdered my son’

‘Yes, we have murdered him.’

They had essentially exchanged this conversation just now. And with none other than the mother of the Red Dragon Khal Gal. But the conversation continued to flow in a completely unexpected direction.

“Well, he was a problem child. He killed his brethren, just to take possession of their hearts.”

The woman’s brows slightly twitched into a frown as she spoke.

Sungjin recalled the hint from earlier, about the hidden boss.

‘Be warned that above the proof of wickedness lies, also, her wrath.’

The proof of wickedness most likely referred to the hidden piece, the items each of the hunters had collected, the Dragon Hearts. But she didn’t seem to mind it much at all.

She only said one more thing to the hunters.

“Good job. I had come to kill him, but you saved me the trouble.”

Sungjin thought as he looked upon her.

‘Khal Gal’s mother is the Hidden boss? We have to face a much older Dragon?’

Chapter 103 – Red Dragon's Lair (9)

Sungjin swallowed in reflex. Besgoro said to him

‘Hey, Kei. It’s common sense that a Dragon grows stronger as they age. Several times over. Let’s skip this one. The one you killed earlier is a really young one, you know? But her...’

Sungjin recalled the opening introductory message the Operator gave as he arrived.

‘Please be warned. The Red Dragon Khal Gal just reached full maturity and is infamous for his brutality.’

Khal gal just reached full maturity. And this was his mother. Even if their age difference was unknown, it was without a doubt she was much more powerful than her son. Sungjin glanced at the other hunters for a moment.

The hunters were almost unable to breathe due to intimidation. It was impossible to ask them to fight. They were all probably thinking ‘Please let us go in peace.’

Besgoro commented

‘Look, they’re freaking out as well.’

Meanwhile, Khal Gal’s mother ignored them as she took a look around the Mountain of Treasure. She picked up a necklace from the mound and said “My, it’s an item ‘from that kingdom’... A kingdom’s heirloom is considered quite precious... and he managed to steal it. No wonder they blamed me.”

She was unconcerned with the Hunters. She walked around the mountain of treasure and said “I’ll have to check them slowly at home.”

She whispered as she placed her hand on the mountain.

“Move.”

The entire mountain of treasure began to glow. And soon, treasures which had been giving off irresistible glow disappeared all at once. Including the gold coins upon which the hunters stood.

“Oof”

All the hunters fell on their behind. They were left in the air with the treasure gone. Now the only ones left in this giant space was the hunters and the woman. She turned her gaze upon them “Yes, brave adventurers who have slain a dragon. If you got everything you came for, get out. It is a rule to destroy lairs of dead dragons. I will give you 30 minutes. I will blow up this volcano in 30 minutes. So get out of this lair, and run as far as you can from here.”

Someone asked the Operator,

“Operator, how much time remaining in the raid?”

[1 hour and 58 minutes]

The timing didn't match. If she exploded the volcano, everyone would die. There was nowhere to run. If they left the Volcano, the Operator would tell them ‘This area is forbidden for Hunters’.

“30 minutes won't work...”

Someone whispered.

“Ooh”

She arrived between the hunters and grabbed a cube.

“What...”

All the hunters were shocked to see what she had done. The Operator's cube never took a hit from any monsters. It would dodge incoming arrows, or fly higher if there was a fire.

And no other hunters could so much as touch the cube of others. But the cube was caught by her, and very effortlessly.

“Whoa...”

Someone let out a strange sound. But once she inspected the

cube, she said “What’s this? You aren’t just any adventurers, are you?”

She rechecked the hunters as if seeing them for the first time and said “And not people of this world to boot. Those who are fated to cross dimensions... So that’s why you were sent to kill Khal Gal. How sad. Who designed all this?”

No one knew what to say. She, for the first time, was a monster who seemed to understand the circumstance the Hunters were trapped in. But then she stopped fiddling around with the cube to say “Then... Am I... a boss too?”

Everyone was shocked. They had long lost the will to fight against her. But she was the one to suggest that she must be fought. Noting that no one replied, she turned to the owner of the cube and said “Hey tell me Human, am I a boss? Someone you must kill no matter what?”

The hunter was unable to reply and stood in place. So she lowered her tone and asked again “Tell me. Truthfully.”

As if under a spell, he began to tell her everything he knew.

“You are a hidden boss. A boss that’s much stronger than the raid boss; a secret. There is no requirement to kill, but doing so is rewarded with large bonuses as a part of hidden elements.”

She began to laugh at his words.

“Ka ha ha ha! Really? How fun! And a hidden boss... what a pleasing name, Hidden Boss...”

She suddenly turned around and said

“So? Any challengers?”

Nobody moved. She grinned and said

“Come on, try. I promise. If you can defeat me, then I will give you a REALLY good reward. A reward that can completely turn around your pitiful fate.”

But the hunters still couldn't dare. Her son Khal Gal was already immensely powerful. There was no hope against her.

Sungjin was also checking the others' state. It would be difficult to fight alone.

'If it was just Khal Gal, I could have put my life on the line and won alone, but... if it's about his mother who is far stronger than he... there is no possibility of success.'

Sungjin already decided to give up on the hidden boss. He had already collected all the hidden pieces up until now. Giving up on it just once would not drastically affect his future performance.

It was the right decision to preserve his life now. But, she added "Ah... I guess you all learned to be careful. I guess you've learned a thing or two while traveling between dimensions."

She twisted her neck twice before continuing.

"Obviously, it would be impossible to defeat me with even a hundred more of you. But what if I imposed a penalty on myself? About three?"

She grinned mischievously.

"One, I will fight not in my dragon form, but in this human one. My physical powers will greatly diminish."

The hunters had seen her close the lid to the chest with one arm. Her reduced power was only in comparison to her dragon form, not that she had grown weak by the hunter's measure.

"Two, I won't use any magic above 8th class. Since doing so would probably kill everything in here."

This also was no major penalty upon her. When Khal Gal launched a fireball (and two at the same time) the size of the fireball was massive. If she were to seriously use magic, the class was not even the main problem.

"Finally, Including my clothes, if you can hurt me in any way, I'll

consider it your victory. How about it?”

The hunters glanced at each other.

‘Just clothes...’

They thought. But, she threw in another word.

“Oh, but that doesn’t mean I’ll stop at just grazing your clothes. I don’t have such a precise control over fire magic.”

This brought the hunters back to reality. They would have to bet their lives to even scratch her clothing.

This hidden boss must have been set to ‘scratch the tip of her clothes’ level of difficulty. Sungjin, as well as the other hunters, seriously pondered over this.

‘What should I do? Is it worth betting my life here?’

As if she read his mind, Moon Specter said

‘I am prepared to fight, Master.’

Besgoro said to her in surprise

‘Hey don’t say something stupid, lady. If he dies, we die and disappear as well’

Besgoro was against it.

‘Hey Kei, you aren’t seriously considering fighting right? That’s madness! Just look at her, you can tell, right? Her pure strength, not to mention her completely ludicrous teleportation magic. Did you ever see that kind of magic? That’s a dragon class power. Power which completely supersedes the idea of Classes, magic at its natural state. If that woman so much as thinks ‘you’re dead’, you’ll just die.’

Sungjin was in a dilemma. She was undoubtedly powerful. But the reward for merely causing a scratch against her clothes was making him have second thoughts.

Especially with her promise of ‘A reward that can completely

turn around your pitiful fate' strongly urged his will to fight.

'You'll die like a dog Sungjin. Give up.'

He thought, as well as

'If I give up now, won't I die later anyway?'

After a little bit of time passed, she sighed as her enthusiasm waned "Yeah well... I guess it was too much to ask for. I'm done with this boss pretend so..."

Sungjin raised his arm to stop her.

"Wait, could you give us a moment to discuss this?"

She grinned at his request and nodded.

"Sure. For us Dragons, time has very little value. I will give you one day's worth of time to talk it over. Or two... I'll give you a week."

But it was physically impossible for hunters to actually take advantage of her good will. Especially for Sungjin who was on a time limit. Sungjin gathered the hunters and said to them "Anyone here who wants to try?"

No one dared to speak. Sungjin grew frustrated and touched the 'Jeremiah's Eye' as he asked again "I'll ask one more time. Anyone here who wants to try?"

He could hear the inner thoughts of others.

'No way, this is suicide. I'm out.'

'Master Hunter... I know he's strong, but isn't he overestimating himself?'

'If it is with him... it might be possible... but it's too dangerous.'

'If it is Master Hunter, he might be able to leave a scratch on her clothes. But what if I die meanwhile? What's the point then?'

'I feel like even if all 10 of us were to cooperate, a few of us would die... this is too dangerous of a gamble.'

It was mostly negative. Not a single one of them seemed interested in trying to figure out if the challenge was even feasible. Sungjin who took turn looking at the dragon of unknown age and the hunters thought ‘What should I do? It’s too tempting to just give up now...’

He considered his options.

‘Ah... if it is him, he might help a little...’

Sungjin took out Soldamyr’s lamp from his vest. He had been saving Soldamyr to face the hidden boss anyway. If they were to give up now, there was nowhere else where Sungjin needed him.

Sungjin stepped away from the others and rubbed the lamp. The Genie was about to greet Sungjin as normal but “Have you called for me, mas... eh?”

He couldn’t finish his words as his eyes grew wide. He saw the woman across from Sungjin and asked “Master, that creature...”

He must have noticed she was no human in a glance.

“She’s a hidden boss. Just like you were once.”

He tsked.

“What...”

“You can probably tell but...”

“A Dragon. Red Dragon.”

“Yes. How is she in your eyes? How strong is she?”

“Unimaginably strong. Strong enough to have no match in this coun...no, this entire planet.”

“Really? You can tell that just by her appearance?”

“No that would not be possible to judge with just her appearance. In fact, doesn’t she appear to be a human woman of about 30 years of age?”

He was right. She had a rigid expression, but in some ways she

even looked as young as twenties. Although that was up to the interpretation of the beholder.

“Thanks to an immortal contract, I am able to measure the level of mana. From what I can see of the mana of that creature... She is about 10,000 years, perhaps even older, dragon.”

10,000 Years. She would have had to begun her life long before written history to have lived to the current day. So Sungjin asked him “So, do you think we have a chance?”

“A chance? No. Truth be told, the only reason why master and the rest of the hunters are still alive is because she has allowed it.”

“I know that. But she said if we can so much as graze her clothes, she will consider it our victory. How about it? Do we stand a chance?”

“Hmm...”

Soldamyr fell silent as he carefully contemplated the idea.

Chapter 104 – Red Dragon's Lair (10)

10 Seconds later Soldamyr finally opened his mouth after carefully thinking.

“If you think rationally, it’s impossible. But...”

‘Then just remain rational, you gloomy shut-in mage’

Besgoro yelled, but only Sungjin could hear.

“I think there is a chance. In ancient text of every country and every age, it is well known that a Dragon is powerful, but an arrogant creature. If you can find a way to use that to your advantage, you may be able to damage the clothes.”

Soldamyr gave a positive response for once.

“Hmm, really?”

Sungjin realized that he must have wished to fight her, seeing how happy he was to hear that there was a chance. Sungjin turned to look upon her. She had certainly been arrogant all this time.

‘Obviously, it would be impossible to defeat me with even a hundred more of you’

“Of course, if she decides to fight seriously, there is no chance of victory. But seeing her like that, she’s just searching for a source of entertainment.”

Soldamyr was right.

‘Ka ha ha ha! Really? How fun! And a hidden boss... what a pleasing name, Hidden Boss...’

She had been extremely pleased when she found out that the hunters might fight her. Soldamyr continued to explain

“To a powerful Dragon, especially an ancient dragon, their worst enemies are actually boredom and apathy. A Dragon who is thoroughly bored will amuse itself with crazed acts of violence

until it is killed by comrades or heroes, and a dragon afflicted with apathy might sleep for tens of thousands of years until it dissolves into mana. If you really do begin to fight her, she will try to entertain herself with you. And perhaps, an opportunity will present itself.”

Sungjin resolved his will upon hearing Soldamyr’s words. The she-dragon had been the most irregular creature he had ever come across.

She grabbed the Hunter’s Cube with her hands. She had said the Hunters had a ‘pitiful fate’. She seemed like a being existing outside the boundary of the Raid, something out of its control.

Of all the NPCs and monsters Sungjin had ever met, she was unique in that she seemed to know something about the raids.

He didn’t know what reward she might give, but whatever it was could most definitely help in bringing the raids to an end.

‘If I die here... then that just means my potential only amounted to this much. I’ll just cheer on the others from the Purgatory.’

Sungjin steeled his resolve as he returned to the others. He told them

“Anyone coming with me?”

“You... you want to try?”

“Are you serious?”

Everyone was surprised at his words, but not one person stepped forward. Sungjin asked one more time.

“I have decided to challenge her. Will no one come with me?”

The hunters continued to look around, but no one responded. It was no surprise since he heard their inner voices earlier.

If everyone came along to take her on together, they might be able to graze against her clothes, but participating would increase the chance of getting themselves killed.

They will die if they are unlucky. This is weighing heavily on their minds.

‘I guess... I am stuck alone in the end...’

Sungjin left behind the others as he headed towards the dragon.

‘Hey, crazy guy’

Besgoro shouted, but Sungjin said to him

“I have already made up my mind, Besgoro”

‘Hey... you’re out of your mind’

“Why not help me, since I’ve already committed myself to it? If you distract me, you only increase the chances of me dying”

Besgoro tried to stop him, but there was nothing more he could do as a spirit. He just shut his mouth again.

“Moon Specter, I’ll rely on you too.”

‘Of course, Master. Please just say the word.’

Sungjin finally stood before the dragon. Standing so close, he felt intimidated. Sungjin closed his eyes.

‘If I die...’

First thing in his mind was Cain. He was not a man, but it was the closest creature he had bonded with since the restart.

Before he had flown past the Lava Fall, (Cain was too large to carry with the Carpet) Cain was returned to his wooden figurine form and sent back to the Ninety Nine Nights Inn. If Sungjin was unable to return to the market tonight, he would be saddened.

Next was people he had befriended through the Raids, such as Franz, Nada, Serin, Mahadas, and others.

‘Well, farewells are an integral part of this Raid anyhow.’

Sungjin opened his eyes while thinking so. Before him was a Dragon in a Human form. Sungjin prepared himself for the last

time, using the Star of the Nameless.

“Rename. Master Hunter.”

He changed his title back to Master Hunter. It was the most powerful title he had in his repertoire. He sheathed Moon Specter once more. She would be called forth along with Ghastly Wail.

Instead, he held the Romance of the Three Kingdoms with his right hand. Blood Vengeance would have been better for damage, but damage didn't matter; he only needed to land a single shot.

Instead, it would be a good idea to prepare one round of magic reflect. Sungjin felt the necklace around his neck, the Yanhurat.

‘I guess... the time to put my life on the line came earlier than I thought.’

An Item he had hardly ever used. An item he had only used in case of emergencies during combat. This time, it was unavoidable.

‘Kill, Kill’

The Necklace which was usually noisily shouting was strangely quiet.

‘What... does it differentiate between people? Like now?’

But it would activate once he gave the word. It was that kind of item. Sungjin finally said to his loyal comrade, Soldamyr.

“Soldamyr, I'll need your help.”

“Yes, Master.”

“If I die, please tell Cain I'm sorry...”

But he replied with

“I am connected to you with a contract. If you die, I cannot maintain my form.”

“Really?”

Soldamyr replied stoically.

“Yes.”

“Then let’s fight for our lives.”

“Yes, Master.”

Sungjin finally stepped up before the Dragon. She looked at him and asked

“So, are you prepared to fight me?”

Sungjin answered her.

“Yes.”

She glanced at the hunters behind Sungjin.

“So? How many of you will fight me at the same time?”

Sungjin gave her an answer.

“Just I”

She was shocked to hear his answer.

“What?”

Sungjin repeated himself assertively.

“I am going to challenge you alone.”

She narrowed her eyes into slits when she heard him.

“Ohh really? Challenging me alone without any assistance from your comrades. I can’t even tell if you’re brave or foolish... what a puzzling human...”

Her voice trailed off as she spoke, but soon continued

“But no matter. Having the courage to overcome the fear of death is the noblest state for a living being.”

She faced the hunters behind Sungjin and said to them

“Stay out of our fight.”

At her words, the nine hunters disappeared suddenly.

‘You could die just because she said so’

While thinking that Besgoro was probably right, she interrupted his thoughts with a question.

“But will you be okay? You’re almost completely out of mana”

Sungjin was shocked when he heard her.

‘That’s right!’

He was busy preparing his equipment and had forgotten to think about his mana. He had spent nearly all of it at the entrance of the Lava Fall earlier.

‘Low Mana’

He had heard the Operator warn him, but he had let it slip out of his mind because he was too busy searching for Hidden Pieces.

“Ah... please give me a second. I’ll go refill my mana...”

But she gestured.

“No, I’ll do it.”

And with just her utterance, Sungjin’s body gave off a blue burst of light. He felt his energy being replenished. Sungjin asked the Operator,

“Operator, my Mana?”

[At Maximum]

Filling up the Mana of an enemy. She was entirely disinterested in winning or losing. She was only looking forward to how Sungjin might amuse her.

‘But thanks to that... I have a chance.’

She extended her hands out of her robes and said

“Come, mortal.”

At the same time, the Operator gave an announcement.

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

[‘Khal Gal’s Mother’ Ariane has appeared!]

Sungjin immediately shouted

“Substitute reading”

Gourmet’s monocle sparkled once and flew into the air along with the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, beginning to read it automatically out loud.

“Cao Cao’s great army pursued deep into the night and reached the fields of Changban.”

It was a familiar passage. It was the same passage as his first Seance, Zhang Fei Yide. Romance of the Three Kingdoms always selected the best passage for the situation.

‘With this... I will be able to seal all her spells for a short duration of time.’

But she was already firing spells his way.

“Eternal Flames of Hell! Inferno.”

The size of her inferno was colossal. It was strong enough to potentially cover the entire cavern in flames. Soldamyr quickly cast a shield using a spell.

“Anti Magic Shield”

But Soldamyr’s spell broke the moment the flames reached it. Seeing that, Besgoro and Sungjin both cast two additional Shields at the same time.

“Anti-Magic Shield”

“Anti-Magic Shield”

But her flames burst through those as well and continued to fly towards Sungjin. Sungjin watched the flames carefully and dodged by tumbling away. Despite flying past three layers of Anti-Magic shield, her inferno was still massive. Sungjin turned to look at the Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

‘Hurry...’

But Gourmet's Monocle was still reading the book.

"But he stared down at the army while blocking the bridge..."

Meanwhile, she flew up into the air and fired another spell.

"Incinerate everything in your path. Fireball."

It was a Fireball in name only. From Sungjin's perspective seeing from below, it looked more like a meteor. Soldamyr yelled

"Master!"

For him to yell, he must have judged that there was nothing he could do. It was something he could not manage with only his magic. Sungjin activated Artemio here.

"Reflect Magic"

Artemio began to glow with a purple light. But Sungjin couldn't help but feel skeptical.

'Can... something like that be reflected?'

It was under 7th class. It met the requirement for the ability to work, but Sungjin was still unsure if it would work properly. But he didn't have any room to ponder on the subject. Being hit by that head on would mean instant death.

Sungjin used Artemio to strike against the fireball. Luckily, the meteor-like ball of fire flew backwards, back towards the Dragon.

"Oooh, you survived two of my spells... how fun."

But she put her hand forth and absorbed the enormous ball of fire. It looked like just about anything was possible for an ancient dragon. There was no damage, but he had earned plenty of time.

"I am Zhang Yide!"

Gourmet's Monocle successfully completed the Substitute Reading.

[Seance of Zhang Fei Yide activated!]

[Passive skill – Enhance Attack(III), Swift(III) applied.]

New powers flowed into Sungjin's body. Sungjin immediately ran towards the dragon. But she was more interested in the book than him.

“Oooh that... is that the power of an ancient omnibus which survived the ages? How interesting, how fun”

She laughed as if she was truly enjoying herself. Sungjin on the other hand grit his teeth as he charged forward.

Chapter 105 – Red Dragon’s Lair (11)

Sungjin ran towards her. She began to mutter something when she noticed him, but he immediately called out

“Shout of Changban!”

Then from behind him,

“Come and battle me to the death!”

An earsplitting yell filled the air. It was just for a moment, but she paused during her incantation. Sungjin used this chance to get within melee range of her.

When he prepared to strike her with Artemio and Moon Specter, she took out a thin and short stick. The stick was only as long as Sungjin’s forearm. But once she grabbed the center of the stick,

“Shing!”

The short stick became a slender staff. Having taken out her staff could only mean that she has decided to face Sungjin with physical attacks. It meant Shout of Changban was effective.

‘It all depends on swordsmanship now’

Sungjin thought to himself as he swung with both swords, with Artemio from the left and Moon Specter from the right; A difficult attack to stop for a normal person.

But she leapt back a little as she rotated her staff.

“Clang ching!”

She managed to deflect both swords. And whatever material the ‘summoned’ staff she held was made of, withstood the blade of Moon Specter which could even cut through obsidian, without a scratch.

In a split second, Sungjin was frozen in place after getting both of his swords deflected. She fixed her posture and stabbed with her

staff.

A tremendous speed, she had aimed for his heart, but Sungjin dodged to the right and out of harm's way. But her staff paused midair and readjusted its course for his left side.

It was as if she had been baiting him to make this move. But Sungjin was able to shift his direction at the last second and dodge it. It was probably thanks to Romance of the Three Kingdom's 'Swift(III)'.

'I am slightly faster'

Getting confident, Sungjin looked to the Dragon to counter attack. But, the staff that should have been next to him was nowhere to be seen.

The staff was already raised above her head. Feeling an instinctive fear, Sungjin immediately held his two swords above his head.

"Clang!"

Right above Moon Specter and Artemio was her staff. If he had been even a little bit slower, her staff would have taken the place his skull would have been. Sungjin felt a chill crawl up his spine. On the other hand,

"Ooh, you can block this?"

She said to Sungjin. This was when he realized

'Those earlier attacks... she was going easy on me'

The first two thrusts against him were done slowly on purpose. She had used the slow left and right attack to limit his range of movement and had planned to land a swift strike against his head down the middle.

She was still toying with him. She lifted the staff slightly and brought it back down. Despite being such a short distance tap, it contained an enormous amount of power.

‘And this is after her physical strength became weakened in human form...’

Sungjin glanced at Yanhurat with the corner of his eyes. He wanted to test her strength first, but he had seen enough in just 3 hits.

Sungjin pushed with every ounce of his strength to knock her staff away and get out from under her weapon. But after he backed off

‘Clang’

Artemio broke in half.

[Warning, Weapon destroyed.]

‘Huh...’

This was the first time he had ever seen a legendary tier weapon break. Luckily, broken equipment were automatically fixed when hunters were sent back to the Ninety Nine Nights. So Sungjin quickly pulled out the Blood Vengeance.

And using the same hand, he picked up Yanhurat and said

“Let’s kill, Yanhurat.”

Soon,

“Kill! Kill!”

It replied in a pace much faster than ever before. Sungjin’s entire began to glow red. Khal Gal’s mother Ariane immediately held her staff properly when she saw it.

She must have realized what the red aura meant.

‘Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!’

Listening to its whisper, Sungjin charged towards her like a bullet. This was Sungjin’s fastest possible state, boosted even further by the Romance of the Three Kingdom’s buffs.

Sungjin swung his blade faster than his own eyes could see. She

Frenzy. An active skill which increases speed by 10% for each hit landed. But there was no point in using it. If he couldn't reach his enemy, what was the point?

The first time he touches her, he'd win. There was no point to using Frenzy. Sungjin continued to swing his sword while ignoring Besgoro's advice. But

[9, 8 ...]

The time continued to pass. But then Besgoro said one more thing.

'Activate Frenzy and cut yourself.'

Sungjin, despite Zealot, heard him.

'What?'

He had doubts but

[7, 6...]

There was no time for hesitation. He would die in 6 seconds.

"Frenzy"

[5, 4]

Sungjin activated Frenzy, and flipped his sword around and cut his side. He cut twice using both swords. Four strikes within 1 second.

'Ugh...'

It hurt. There was no time to cut himself carefully with his swords.

[3]

Ariane paused and gave Sungjin a look.

"What? Giving up?"

She had thought perhaps Sungjin had fallen into despair and was trying to suicide. And it made her sorely disappointed.

‘The toy broke.’

She thought. And it created an opening against her. Sungjin attacked her with the swords drenched in his own blood. With a speed incomparable with before.

[2, 1, 0]

In the last remaining 3 seconds, Sungjin launched dozens of attacks. And then

[Seance has ended]

Finally, the effect of Romance of the Three Kingdoms had come to an end. And as soon as it came to an end, Ariane who had been blocking Sungjin’s attacks suddenly said

“Stop”

Sungjin who had been swinging his sword with the intent to kill suddenly froze in place. He couldn’t move.

‘Is this Dragon’s Voice?’

It required no incantation. Her words were simply obeyed. An ability reaching the realm of godhood. No matter how Sungjin looked at it, she was taking it easy on him.

Once his master was in danger, Soldamyr who was reduced to watching the fight while sweating (since his magic was also sealed) quickly flew over and tried to protect his master.

“Sonic Wave”

But

“You stop too.”

Soldamyr was stopped by her command as well. She addressed them while they were both stuck in place

“Ha... you were amazing. Really.”

Sungjin examined her hooded outfit while he was stuck. He was checking for any rip since the hood had been the primary target of

his final rush. But not a single thread had been harmed of her clothes.

‘It’s over.’

But the Operator gave a congratulatory message.

[Congratulations. Hidden Boss]

[Khal Gal’s Mother Ariane’s bet is a success]

Sungjin was shocked.

‘But she doesn’t look hurt anywhere!’

Just then from her left cheek, a line of blood had appeared. One of his strikes hand landed. Ariane used a finger to wipe her cheek.

The cut disappeared without a trace. Ariane licked her finger. Then with a complicated look, she said to Sungjin.

“Haa... it was fun after all... but I didn’t think you could actually hurt... I was going to kill you after having my fill of the fun.”

Seeing her say that, Sungjin couldn’t help but feel that she may have had a cruel heart akin to that of her son.

“But a promise is a promise.”

She relaxed her expressions and said

“Move. You did well.”

Sungjin was able to move again.

‘Kill kill kill!!!!’

Yanhurat was still shouting despite the fight being over. But she said

“Ah, calm down first.”

And immediately the voice was cut off. Sungjin returned to normal. And shortly after, extreme fatigue hit him. It was for only a few seconds, but he had fought past his physical limit.

Sungjin planted Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance into the

ground to support himself as he leaned on them. She spoke to him meanwhile.

“How extraordinary. Even if you had help from this and that... the fact that a human can pull that off... it was incredible.”

She was truly congratulating him from the bottom of her heart. Now that the fight was over, it would be in his best interest to befriend her. Sungjin said to her

“I have learned much from you. Speed is one thing... I have never seen anyone so skilled with a staff.”

She responded without any expression on her face

“Well, I have lived over a hundred times longer than you. But you were different... It was unbelievable”

Sungjin bowed at her compliment. And replied

“You said earlier, that we were in a ‘pitiable fate’. I don’t know how much you know about our circumstance... but I want to end it. This fate of ours. And I want to stop fighting. Please help me.”

She grinned at Sungjin’s word and said

“Such old cliché lines. Hero is victorious, and the Dragon rewards him with treasures.”

Sungjin became nervous at her words. But she soon added

“Okay, well the Hidden Boss lost. I’ll have to spit out a reward. Something really good, right?”

Sungjin couldn’t help but nod.

Chapter 106 – Red Dragon's Lair (12)

Ariane lifted her hands up and said

“Summon”

And on her palm was a small ring. She handed it over to Sungjin. Sungjin examined the strange ring.

The ring was transparent, and a mysterious blue material floated within. The material moved unpredictably. It sometimes bundled up together, separated, or flowed like water.

While Sungjin was watching the material, Ariane said “It’s an item containing the power of the strongest Wizard in human history, Anatol of the Blue Sky.”

Sungjin tilted his head when he heard this. He had heard the name ‘Blue Sky Wizard’ before. But Soldamyr next to him replied “My goodness, this object contains that wizard’s power?”

Sungjin stared at him. Now that he thought of it, Soldamyr mentioned it before.

‘There are several famous wizards in history, but among them, Wizard of the Black Flames, Wizard of Purple Light, and Firmament Wizard are the most famous. Since I am a blue magician myself, I respected and studied the Wizard of the Blue Sky Anatol the most...’

Sungjin held the ring above his head. But instead of an information screen, he heard the Operator say [Unclaimed item.]

Sungjin frowned. Even if he found something in a raid, if the Operator did not officially grant the item to him, he couldn’t check any info nor use it.

‘Just what kind of item is it...?’

He thought when Ariane told him

“Put it on.”

Sungjin replied to her

“But I can’t equip nor use it right now.”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

Sungjin tapped on his cube and said

“Without the Cube’s permission, even if I have an item like this I can’t use it. Probably once the raid is over, I will be granted the item as part of the normal raid reward process. And once it’s been officially awarded to me, I’ll probably be able to use it.”

“Hmm really?”

Ariane walked up to him and snatched the cube out of the air. It was the second time he saw it happen, but it was still amazing. She could grab other’s cube. Ariane said as she took a look at the cube.

“This really does... look like an item related to...”

Sungjin opened his eyes wide.

“You know who made it?”

Sungjin never even imagined that the cube hid clues as to its maker. He immediately asked “This... I mean you know someone that made the Operator?”

Ariane gave Sungjin a look as she replied

“I don’t know for sure... but an item has a creator of some sort, right?”

The ‘Operator’ was a tool for progressing the Raid system. If there was a maker of the system, then it meant he was the architect who planned the whole thing.

“Just who...”

“...I can’t tell you any more than that... Mother warned me not to get involved with it.”

“Mother?”

Seeing his surprise, she replied in a ‘matter of fact’ manner.

“What? Every living being has a mother, right?”

She was right. Sungjin was abandoned and orphaned as a child, but someone must have given birth to him. What had surprised him was the fact that she also had a mother who was taking care of her.

Ariane was plenty strong on her own. He couldn’t even imagine how powerful her mother must be. Sungjin said to her “Couldn’t you give me the smallest hint about it? Who planned and carried out this raid system?”

Ariane looked off to the side for a moment before replying.

“It’s not exactly correct to say the raids were planned and carried out per se... how to say this... More like the raids are being watched and recorded... since there’s meaning in doing so.”

She said something he couldn’t quite comprehend. Sungjin thought of using ‘Jeremiah’s eye’ to find out more. If he could read her surface thoughts (if it was possible), he might find out something more profound, but unfortunately, it was on cooldown.

“Well... if it’s just hint”

She raised her hands once more

“Summon.”

She had summoned a pen. She handed it over to Sungjin and said “Try using this. I don’t know if this will give you a hint though.”

Sungjin accepted the pen. The pen looked very ordinary. Its exterior looked like it could be found in any regular stationary shop. When Sungjin was busy looking at the pen, Ariane suddenly said her farewell.

“It was fun, Human. I hope that my presents will help you escape your tragic fate.”

Sungjin looked at her. He had so many questions for her, but it didn't seem like she would tell him any more than what she already did.

“Thank you very much.”

Sungjin lowered his head to express his gratitude.

“Then I'll take my leave.”

When he looked back up, she was already gone. The only thing remaining was the ring and the pen she had left behind. Although it wasn't officially awarded to him, it was still something he had earned.

Sungjin was about to place the items into his pocket, but he noticed a piercing gaze. Soldamyr was tilting his head to see the item in Sungjin's hands. Sungjin handed the ring to him.

Soldamyr was overwhelmed that it was offered to him, and carefully received the ring with both of his hands.

“Ohhh... this is the...”

Sungjin wasn't sure yet, but it was apparently an amazing item. Sungjin asked him “So what is it?”

“I don't know... Just... there is an incredible amount of Mana contained within.”

Sungjin took the Ring back. The material within was still moving strangely.

‘If I want to find out what's in it... I need to quickly get to distribution.’

All he had to do was use the Trollseeker marble. But he couldn't use it here yet. If he were to use it here, he might have to spend quite an effort and time to get to where the trolls might be.

Dimensional transfer was best used where the boss was located. Sungjin moved back to the Lava fall and said “Soldamyr, give me flight.”

“Power to defy Gravity, Levitation!”

Sungjin left the cave with the treasure with Soldamyr. Once they were out of the spacious cavern, he could see the hunters in the distance. The hunters were shocked to see Sungjin again.

“A...Alive...”

“Did you succeed?”

Sungjin moved between them and said

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“Ohhh...”

“Amazing.”

But he had no time to be listening to their praises. Sungjin said to them “I am going to leave here. The rest of you work...”

He was about to finish his words when he noticed the ‘Friar’. A potential troll. Originally, he was planning to trick him with ‘Let’s troll together’, and kill him after, but it would take too long. Sungjin just said to the Hunters “Work together and hunt rest of the mobs.”

“What? You’re leaving?”

Several hunters asked, but he didn’t have time to answer their questions. Sungjin shook his hand and said “Well... I can’t explain everything but Mr. Immortal and Mr. Friar, may I see the two of you real quick please?”

Sungjin called them over. The hunters were curious about what Sungjin was up to, but they didn’t dare interrupt what he was doing. They were already seeing ‘Master Hunter Sungjin’ as a monster stronger than a Dragon.

The Immortal and Friar came forward as instructed. Sungjin faced them and said “For Mr Immortal... Please rally the other hunters and hunt down rest of the mobs. If you utilize your leadership, you will be able to manage it with the nine of you.”

The Immortal had been cooperative with Sungjin from start to finish.

“Yes, Master Hunter.”

“Ok, go back for now.”

Sungjin sent the immortal back to the group and was left alone with the Friar. The Friar couldn't possibly know what Sungjin wanted to say. He probably thought Sungjin just wanted to say 'Since you are a healer, please take care of the others'

Like Sungjin had done with the Immortal. But Sungjin suddenly said “I know what you're planning.”

“Excuse me?”

Disregarding the Friar's surprise, Sungjin just continued to speak.

“I don't know if you are going to do it in the future or not but... I'll give you just one warning. If you do it in the future, I will be coming after you to kill you.”

Sungjin had avoided using the word, but his words made the 'Friar' freeze up. Sungjin had correctly read his mind.

“You understand, right?”

Sungjin patted his shoulder twice and walked over to the others.

“Then I hope we see each other again, friends.”

Sungjin left behind the hunters and walked back to the cavern with Khal Gal's corpse.

After taking out the Trollseeker marble, he said “Pursuit of Justice”

Pillar of bright light came down upon Sungjin from above.

[Dimensional transfer requested.]

The distribution began.

[Monsters Slain. Hell Hound: 48. Magma Golem: 4. Red Dragon Demihuman: 2. Total 32000 points.]

[Boss Monster Slain: 'Red Dragon' Khal Gal: 2000 points.]

[Hidden Boss: 'Khal Gal's Mother' Ariane: 2000 points.]

[Final Point count: 36000. Distributing points.]

[Your contribution is 58%. 20880 Stat points, 20880 Black Coins awarded. Raid Clear Bonus 3000 Stat points and 3000 Black Coins awarded. Item effect 'Additional 10% gained' activated. Distributing 23880 Stat points and 26268 Black Coins.]

Because it was a ten man raid, despite his percentage being the worst he's ever seen, the reward was several times higher than in other raids.

[And now we will distribute the items.]

Sungjin solemnly awaited the items to appear.

[Redrun – Red Dragon Scale Armor]

[Aio – Ring of Great Sage]

[Mu – Brush of reply]

[Merka – Pulp of Evolution]

[Enhancement Stone X3]

An incredible number of items burst forth. Not only had he been rewarded with the items Ariane had handed over, but he also received Scale Armor, Pulp of Evolution, and three Enhancement stones.

[Congratulations, Legendary Item Redrun...]

Everything he received was of legendary class. Sungjin put everything away except for the Scale Armor, Ring, and the brush. Meanwhile, the Operator granted him a title.

[Last but not the least, you will be awarded titles you've earned on this raid.]

[Dragon Slayer – Attacking a Dragon deals four times the normal damage.]

“Ooh...”

Dragon Slayer was an attractive name. And the passive ‘deal four times the damage’, although it wasn’t immediately useful, if he ever had to fight a dragon, it would prove even more useful than Master Hunter title.

‘Since I have Star of the Nameless, there might be a day I might use it...’

Sungjin decided to keep it in mind.

[Distribution has ended.]

[Request for Dimensional transfer has been granted.]

[You will be teleported in 10 seconds. 10, 9]

Sungjin said to Soldamyr,

“Soldamyr, let’s meet back at the Inn.”

“Yes Master”

Soldamyr bid his farewell, and soon after, Sungjin was teleported. To the new Dimension.

Sungjin took a look around. Khal Gal’s corpse was visible on the other side, with his tongue hanging out.

‘It must have been a relatively successful party...’

Sungjin had killed Khal Gal and even cleared the hidden boss, but not much time had actually passed. The fact that Khal Gal was taken down so quickly meant that this party had been full of strong members.

‘I don’t think they could have gotten far...’

Sungjin decided to run towards the cavern where the Hidden piece was located. Since if there were any trolls, they would have

gone in that direction.

But even as he ran, he checked the items he had obtained from the raid by raising them above his head. Normally he would have slowly checked them after killing the trolls, but this time he couldn't hold himself back out of curiosity.

‘Just what does it do?’

Chapter 107 – Red Dragon's Lair (13)

The first thing Sungjin held up was the Red Dragon's Scale Armor. It looked like it was an item made of Khal Gal's scales judging from the size and the colour of it.

Sungjin held it in the air as he ran. The Operator's information screen soon popped up.

Redrun – Red Dragon's Scale Armour

Legendary Breastplate

Protection 43%

Passive Skill

Dragon Scales (Red) – Reduce damage from Fire by 20%

Dragon's Rage (I) – Each hit taken increases stack of Dragon's Rage by one. Maximum 25 stacks.

Active Skill

Dragon's Breath(Red) – Consume all stacks of Dragon's Rage to fire Dragon's Breath.

Armour created from Khal Gal's scales.

Although the scale is much smaller, it could recreate Dragon's Breath.

The information screen shook up and down as he ran, but he could understand its core features.

'Ooh'

Sungjin immediately

"Equip"

It had already been ten chapters, but he had not a single armour on his chest, and now he obtained a legendary class item.

'I can now use Dragon's Breath... but how does it work?'

He didn't know its effects, but he would eventually come to know what it could do. Next was the most important ring.

Red Dragon Ariane had said 'it can alter your fate' and Soldamyr was deeply impressed with the ring that he held up.

Aio – Ring of the Great Sage

Unique Legendary Ring

Passive Skill

Great Save (Blue) – Allows casting of every Blue Magic Spells.

Active Skill

Empower Magic (V) – Increase Magic power by 5 times for 30 seconds.

Usable once a day.

Ring containing Anatol's Power.

He had created items like this ring from a very young age.

The most immediately noticeable feature was the fact that it was a Unique Legendary Tier Item; an Item only one person in the entire world was allowed to use.

Seeing how a veteran mage such as Soldamyr had accepted it with both hands with respect gave proof of what a precious treasure it was. The price on it would be astronomical.

Sungjin continued to read the information sheet. There were two very eye catching details. 'Allows casting of every Blue Magic Spells'. And 'Increase Magic power by 5 times for 30 seconds'.

'These two... if these two can be combined...'

Sungjin recalled the time he had visited the Dragon Demihuman's Spellshop.

'Then...'

He could think of a few interesting scenarios but in the distance,

“Binding Frost! Frostbite!”

He could hear someone casting a spell. Sungjin quickly

“Equip”

Put the ring on one of his fingers, and put the pen away in his pocket. He ran towards the source of the voice. Now that he thought of it, he still had the title of Master Hunter hanging over his head.

Sungjin took out the Star of the Nameless. He had changed his title to fight Ariane. Roughly 10 minutes should have passed by now. He then said

“Rename”

To use the item to change his name to ‘Adjudicator’ and headed into the fight’.

‘Iron Will’ Tanabat was happy until just a moment ago. In the first ten man raid, he was nervous facing the gigantic dragon but thanks to his powerful allies, he was able to survive after killing the beast. Of course, he had been scratched on his chest and received a severe burn on his head due to the breath attack.

But after dozens of minutes of intense fighting, the battle had ended without a loss of life.

‘Thank you, Buddha.’

He gathered his hands and prayed. Then he walked up to the team’s most skilled combatant, the ‘Divine Archer’ to thank him.

“Thank you, Divine Archer. If it weren’t for you... I would have died.”

The ‘Divine Archer’ was a Mideastern Asian on the smaller side, swift and agile, and was incredibly accurate with the bow. He had blinded the dragon with his arrows.

He also used some strange magic to prevent the Dragon’s

reinforcements (Hellhounds and Dragon Demihumans) from joining the fray. If it weren't for him, one or two hunters would have died. Despite Tanabat's expression of gratitude, he remained humble.

"It's no big deal. It was all thanks to you Iron Wall sir for doing a good job."

He answered. Humility despite strength, polite demeanor despite rough appearance (large nose, thick beard); Tanabat thought highly of him.

'I hope we can meet again.'

The Raid continued to progress after the boss was slain. Of course for the purpose of increasing the amount of contribution points. If they were lucky, they would be able to obtain the hidden piece. But meanwhile, there was a problem. Someone decided to ask

'Operator, what's my Contribution level?'

One by one, people checked their contribution and noticed it was very low, around 8 to 10 percent.

The reason was obvious; it was because the Divine Archer had taken the lion's share. Tanabat also had a small percentage of less than 10, but he didn't mind it.

He had accepted it as the fair share proportional to his skill. So he couldn't predict that several unhappy hunters would collude to 'troll'.

While the group was hunting the hellhound together, he noticed that the arrows from the Divine Archer had stopped, so he turned to check. Behind, four hunters were attacking the Divine Archer at the same time.

"What's going on?"

Tanabat tried to get them to stop, but it was pointless. Four hunters were hellbent on trolling. It wasn't clear when they talked

it out, but they were working together against the Divine Archer.

Four trolls were flagged simultaneously. Tanabat proactively jumped into the fray to protect the Divine Archer. So it became 4 versus 2. The enemy was still twice their number.

But because the Tank and Archer synergized well, they were able to put up a good fight. The problem was that three of the other hunters who were watching joined on the side of the trolls.

Then the Red Mage who had been firing spells beside the Divine Archer had joined on the side of Tanabat, but it was still 7 to 3. Tanabat fought fiercely, but the Red Mage was eventually killed. One of the enemies finally got shot down and killed by an arrow, but it was still 6 to 2. Tanabat was in danger of being killed for choosing to protect a talented individual from jealous and greedy hunters.

That is, until moments ago.

“6 Trolls at once, I’ve hit Jackpot.”

Someone suddenly appeared in the middle of the fight. An “Adjudicator” wielding a sword in each hand appeared, surprising everyone present.

‘Is it a monster? Or a hidden boss?’

But it didn’t matter what or who he was. In the middle of the pitched battle, he was either an enemy or an ally. One of the trolls shouted to the Adjudicator

“Who are you? Do you also want to die?”

The Adjudicator began to swing his sword without reply when confronted. And once the fighting began, Tanabat couldn’t help but become even more surprised.

He was unbelievably skilled. Divine Archer who could land every arrow was amazing, but his skill was on a completely different level.

He had begun to fight with six trolls alone. The Divine Archer supported him as well with support fire. Thus, three out of six trolls were killed within seconds. The trolls who saw that

“Uh...”

“M...Mercy!”

Began to run away. They ran back towards the Khal Gal’s main cavern. Adjudicator chased after them without a word. But the Divine Archer was even faster than him.

‘Pew~pew~’

The arrows flew and landed on the heel of two of the hunters

‘Pew~pew~’

Followed by arrows piercing their hearts and head. This angered the ‘Adjudicator’.

“Hey! Divine Archer! Stop! I’ll kill them, I will!”

Tanabat couldn’t quite understand him, only that he expressed the desire to kill them with his own hands.

And the Divine Archer

“Eh?”

Was surprised. He put his bow down. The Adjudicator turned towards the last troll and

“Frost Bite!”

Froze him in place and cut off his head. Of the ten hunters, only Tanabat and the Divine Archer remained alive. Tanabat couldn’t help but feel tense when the Adjudicator walked towards them.

He didn’t know who it was, but it was possible that the Adjudicator was hostile against everyone. He turned to the Divine Archer and said

“Hey... Shouldn’t we make a run for it?”

But the Divine Archer shook his head.

“No, that man... he’s not a bad man.”

Tanabat didn’t know with what evidence he said that, but Tanabat couldn’t relax. Not many, not even villains, could indiscriminately swing their swords at someone they just met.

But the Adjudicator very unhesitatingly and skillfully pulled it off. So Tanabat found it difficult to trust him.

He held two blood dripping swords and wore a flaming skull over his head.

Tanabat had seen many strange hunters as chapters progressed, but this man seemed particularly far from normal. The Adjudicator walked from corpse to corpse to pick up fallen items.

Upon closer inspections, he was picking copies of armours and equipment the dead hunters were wearing. As if he was a kind of was a kind of scavenger picking through corpses.

‘I thought it was impossible to take items of other people...’

As Tanabat was thinking so, the Adjudicator finished picking up the items and said

“How sad... there were six, but I could only kill four of them...”

He muttered to himself as he walked towards Tanabat and the Divine Archer. To them he then asked

“Hey, are you two alright?”

Tanabat nodded. But the Divine Archer said

“It’s been a while.”

Adjudicator tilted his head and replied

“What, you know me?”

Tanabat also stared at the Divine Archer. He was curious as to how they could know each other. But then when the Divine Archer raised his hands to touch his neck, he pulled away the skin.

And beneath the darkened and rough skin, he saw the exact opposite, unblemished white skin. Tanabat couldn't help but be astonished.

When the Divine Archer lifted up the skin of his face... no his mask, the entire body began to transform.

He who had looked like a very hairy middle eastern man was now transformed into an asian woman with an elegant straight hair.

While Tanabat was staring with his jaws wide open, he could hear the voice of the Adjudicator from behind.

“...It has certainly been a while, Miss Serin...”

Chapter 108 – Red Dragon's Lair (14)

Sungjin stared at the maskless Serin. Straight long hair, white skin, high nose and glossy lips. She still boasted graceful and elegant appearance.

The only thing that changed was the 'God of Bows' title above her head and few pieces of equipment. And even most of those were upgraded since the last time. But then Besgoro couldn't contain his habit.

'Ohh, it's a beautiful Asian lady this time. She has smaller boobs than the other lady, but it's still fantastic. Hey Kei, since when did you...'

Sungjin took off Besgoro as he said

"It looks like you've been well, Serin."

"You too, Kei."

Her gaze contained a look of fascination. She had treated him coldly last time they met, but this time she acted much more friendly towards him. Sungjin thought as he looked upon her 'I had thought we'd eventually run into each other... but it was much quicker than I anticipated... It's probably due to travelling through dimensions, but... still, a strange fate that ties us.'

Even for Sungjin who could travel between dimensions, the maximum number he could run into was limited to 49 people per round.

As far as the probabilities go there was a very small chance for them to run into each other, but they were able to meet again against all odds. Sungjin glanced around at the corpses and said "I guess your luck with comrades is still poor."

She smiled at his words and said

"Well, there's bound to be trolls here and there. More

importantly...”

She held up her mask.

“Thanks to you telling me about this... I didn’t have to go through that again. No one seemed too interested in a bearded man.”

Sungjin grinned at her words. She had picked an excellent mask for herself. She asked Sungjin “So, how did you get here? You weren’t here when we started, right?”

This was the main question most people asked. If it was anyone else asking the question, Sungjin would have found a suitable excuse to avoid the issue, but Sungjin decided to tell her the truth. But the Southeastern Asian man standing next to them bothered Sungjin.

Sungjin glanced at him. The fact that he stood on the other side of the trolls probably meant he was a good man, but Sungjin couldn’t tell his secrets to someone he didn’t know.

“Sorry, but can you leave us for a bit?”

At Sungjin’s request, he obediently moved away from them. Once he was out of earshot, Sungjin said to her “There is an item for finding trolls. So I use it to track down and kill trolls that appear in other dimensions.”

“Ahh...”

Sungjin pointed to the title above his head “I got Adjudicator title from that round. I am putting it to good use.”

“Ah... is that why you were shouting that you wanted to kill them?”

“Yes”

“If it was anyone else, I wouldn’t have stopped firing arrows. Because I have it too, Adjudicator.”

Now that he saw, there were items fallen around corpses finished

off by arrows. She must have obtained the title of Adjudicator meanwhile.

“But then I heard a familiar voice. So I stopped.”

“Ah, I see. Then you were.... Thank you.”

Sungjin expressed his gratitude. She also had Adjudicator but had yielded the trolls for Sungjin’s sake.

“No, I am the one feeling grateful. Dealing with six at once would have been difficult for me.”

“... I am glad if you think that way.”

“You have saved me twice already. I don’t know how to repay you...”

Her voice trailed off as she spoke. Sungjin pulled out the Holy water of Baptism from his pockets. Luckily, he had one more thanks to obtaining a white coin from Franz.

“There’s no need for repaying... Please just let me do this.”

She tilted her head.

“Excuse me?”

Sungjin shook the bottle slightly as he held it up. The holy water splashed about within the glass bottle.

“This is... an item which grants 10% of my stats as a buff. Also, it allows us to meet again. When you need me.”

She replied back to him.

“We can meet if I need you?”

“Yes.”

“What do you...”

Serin looked deeply confused, which was expected. The ability of this holy water was something outside the boundary of common sense of the raid system.

“This is...”

Sungjin was about to explain but stopped himself. It would be easier to just see it, so Sungjin decided to skip the explanation and move straight to the baptism. She would likely accept it without any clarification.

“Please hold still”

At his request, she calmly stood still. Sungjin opened the glass bottle and poured the liquid over her.

“Baptise”

Light burst forth from her figure. It was already the third time he had seen it, but it was still an unfamiliar sight to behold. Few seconds later, the light faded away, and the Operator gave an announcement.

[You were ‘Chosen’ by someone. Title granted.]

[Chosen one – Receive 20% of the chooser’s stat as bonus stat. Once a day, you may summon the Chooser with his permission.]

She was astonished at the Operator’s explanations.

“Bonus is... 20%?”

“Yes, please check it.”

“Operator, My status please.”

She opened her status screen and checked her stats. And was astonished again.

“I didn’t even equip it yet... so this is 10% of your stats?”

“Yes, well... yes.”

She looked back and forth between the screen and Sungjin’s face. It looked like she had difficulty believing her eyes. Sungjin scratched the back of his head as he said “Well, you can probably guess but... it’s a good title. See if it’s worth equipping it. More importantly, the next part is key; you can request the chooser to

appear by your side once a day.”

She swallowed audibly.

“I see.”

“As it suggests, you can summon me once. During the raid, or once the raid is over. Since you can’t change your title mid-raid... try calling me after the raid is over. Tonight. After...”

Sungjin thought for a moment. He had promised to meet Franz at 6 in the evening.

“5 PM. Please call me. We’ll meet and have a conversation then.”

“... So all I have to do is say your name?”

“Yes. If you ask the Operator...”

But when Sungjin was about to explain, he was suddenly interrupted.

[The Chosen One requested your teleportation.]

Sungjin’s cube suddenly spoke. He turned to stare at the cube.

‘Is it Franz? What a timing...’

But the image displayed on the screen above the cube was not Franz, but Nada. The image of Nada spoke to him.

“Hey, Mr Boobs. You said to call for you when I’m in trouble right? I am in trouble.”

Sungjin was shocked to see her. Behind her, Sungjin could see Khal Gal’s breath attack filling the screen. If she was saying she was in danger, then she was truly in peril.

‘I cannot lose her.’

[Do you accept the request? 10, 9]

The Operator’s Countdown began. Sungjin quickly said to Serin “Someone is requesting my help. I have to go.”

Serin nodded hesitantly

“Yes... I saw...”

She was able to see the image of Nada appear from the cube as well.

“But... Mr Boobs...?”

Sungjin face flushed bright red.

[8, 7, 6]

But there was no time to clear up the misunderstanding right now. The timer was ticking.

“There’s no time to explain. Please call me. 5 PM, got it?”

“Yes... I understand.”

[5, 4, 3]

Finally, Sungjin pointed to the direction of the Lava fall in the distance and told her “The hidden piece is behind the Lava Fall in that direction. You can enter the location after freezing the lava. Please search for the hidden piece.”

And finally

[2, 1]

He told the Operator,

“I’ll accept. Summon.”

[Teleport request accepted.]

And after their brief reunion, Sungjin disappeared from the spot.

Once Sungjin was gone, Serin continued to stare the spot he disappeared from. Then she said in a small voice “Just what...”

Master Hunter Kei appeared suddenly with the title of Adjudicator swinging away with his swords, rushed to collect fallen items, performed a strange baptism out of nowhere, and disappeared before she could get a grip.

‘There were so many things I wanted to ask about on our second meeting...’

She thought as she walked over the corpses to collect the fallen items from the trolls. Tanabat walked up to her and asked “Is it... someone you knew?”

She answered

“Yes, he is someone I met when... in a past raid.”

“I see. He was quite a monster.”

“Yes. Well, I think... he’s probably the strongest hunter.”

“Is that so? Well... Once I saw the way he handled his sword earlier... I think I can believe that. What’s his name?”

“...Kei.”

“Kei... Kei you say... what a simple name. Is that his real name?”

With his question, she finally remembered ‘He promised that he would tell me his name if we meet again...’

Because of how sudden their meeting and separation was, she had no chance to ask.

‘He said to call for him at 5.’

She asked the Operator.

“Operator, Remaining time?”

[1 hour and 38 minutes.]

‘...Then...’

Once the Raid is over, she would arrive at the Black Market at around 2 to 3 pm. In other words, there were roughly 4 to 5 hours until she can see him again.

‘...I’ll make sure to ask him this and that when we meet.’

She told herself as she turned to look at the Lava Fall Sungjin had indicated. She could probably fly over there. She turned to

Tanabat and asked “Hey, are you able to fly?”

“Yes. My boots have a flight feature.”

“Really? Then let’s go there together. The hidden piece is located there apparently.”

“Hidden Piece? Sounds good. Air Walk.”

His item activated and he was able to walk up into the air as if he was climbing a ladder. Serin fluttered her cape as she said “Sylphid, let me fly.”

Winds began to blow, billowing against her cape. Soon her body floated in the air. The cape she wore was a cape of the Fairies.

Flying was but one of its features; it was able to use the power of wind to push projectiles out of her way. She flew into the sky and approached the Lava Fall. She was happy that she could see Kei again, but the ending was oddly slightly upsetting.

‘Why is that so?’

Serin asked herself. Then she recalled earlier ‘Hey, Mr Boobs. You said to call for you when I’m in trouble right? I am in trouble.’

She recalled the face of the woman who had called for Sungjin. The woman had western features and looked extremely alluring.

‘... So I wasn’t the only one he chose...’

She thought as she flew above the location said to contain the hidden piece.

‘Also... Mr Boobs... what was that about?’

Strange questions popped into her head one by one.

Chapter 109 – Red Dragon's Lair (15)

Sungjin was teleported to another dimension along with a bright light. He tried to search for Nada as soon as he arrived, but he didn't have a chance to even look around because there was a giant ball of fire falling towards him from above.

‘Eeh...’

He didn't have many tools at his disposal. It was too late to chant something, and Artemio was broken. Sungjin was forced to resort to his last line of defense, throwing his frozen mantle over himself and shouting “Solidify!”

Soon from close by,

‘Boom!’

The ball of fire exploded. Thanks to deploying his spell on time, Sungjin was able to withstand the attack without being blown away, but he had to take on the resulting fire blast head on.

‘Ugh...’

Sungjin's hair curled, and his skin got slightly burnt. But thankfully, Sungjin was wearing the Red Dragon's Scale Armor (Most likely made of Khal Gal's own scales). Unlike other parts of his body, the parts protected by the scale armor had been mostly protected from the flames.

‘This is really useful.’

Sungjin thought to himself as he took a look around. The first thing he noticed was Khal Gal running rampant, flying around the cavern. He was firing balls of fire as large as his fists as he flew by. Sungjin looked around for the other hunters and groaned.

‘Ugh...’

He saw several corpses ripped in half, or turned into cinders. Only five hunters were still alive. As she had said, they were in

trouble.

Sungjin checked Khal Gal again. Khal gal was slowly coming back down to the ground. But Sungjin couldn't see any major wound on his body. The party had been unable to deal any meaningful damage upon him despite the sacrifice of half of their members.

‘Wow... I need to focus... this time it's really dangerous.’

Sungjin thought as he prepared to fight Khal Gal once more. But this time, Blood Vengeance and Moon Specter seemed to bite harder than before.

Despite not landing any proper hits, Khal Gal bellowed out in pain each time his swords made contact with his scales.

‘Ah right... I had that.’

Sungjin just recalled that he had earned the ‘Dragon Slayer’ Title. Although he did not receive the 4x damage boost due to not having the title equipped, it still granted him double the damage compared to the last time he had fought Khal Gal. Nada used her signature black magic to support Sungjin.

“Tense muscles, brittle bones, weakness”

She harassed the dragon. The other hunters were greatly stunned by Sungjin's appearance, but they began to join Sungjin in the offensive. Sungjin succeeded in defeating Khal Gal once more with their help.

“Kraghwagar...”

Khal Gal let out a death throe as he collapsed into the ground.

“Wahh!”

“We did it!”

While the other hunters were celebrating their victory, Sungjin leaned against the fallen dragon and “Whew...”

Let out a deep sigh. It was a difficult fight. Because he had blown

all of his cooldowns on his major items, he had no help from his items this time around. If it wasn't for his Dragon Slayer title, he might have had to put his life on the line to finish the dragon off.

Nada approached the resting Sungjin. She first expressed her gratitude.

“Thank you. All of our tanks had burnt to death, so we were in a pinch. But you saved us.”

Sungjin waved his hands and said

“Ah, no problem. Instead...”

‘Boobs! Ooooh! Great as always!’

Sungjin removed Besgoro once again and took a deep breath before replying.

“Did you come to realize that it was all a misunderstanding?”

To his question, she raised both of her hands and said “Well, yes. You kept trying to help me... I think I had the wrong idea about you.”

Sungjin nodded without getting up from his spot.

“That’s really great. Back then... there was just not enough time... I didn’t have a choice.”

“I thought over it last night... I realized... you probably had reasons.”

Sungjin wrapped up his break and stood up as he said “Well then... I’ll be on my way.”

“Way? Where to?”

“... I have to visit other dimensions too.”

Nada replied to his words.

“Other dimensions? Right now?”

Sungjin a had total of five Trollseeker Marbles. But he had spent

far too long in this one. Most of the Trolling will occur right after the defeat of Khal Gal within his main chamber, so he could reduce the time it took to find trolls in each jump by simply starting off in the chamber, but there was no guarantee with the raid system. If the trolling occurred in the middle of the maze, he might have to invest a great deal of time combing the map for them.

“Well I want to give you a better explanation but... I don’t have time this time around either. But... since you can request my summon once a day, you can wait until the next time you are in danger. If not...”

Sungjin took a pause to think. He had appointments at 5 and 6 pm.

“7 PM. If you want, please call me at 7 pm.”

“Seven... Got it.”

Sungjin faced the other four hunters and said

“If it’s just five... hunting might prove to be a bit dangerous...”

She lifted up her staff at his comment. It was the Mad Magician Lenin’s staff of Cerberus.

“Normal Mobs will be fine with just the five of us. Since I’m here.”

Sungjin looked upon her.

“Then since the Hidden Piece is behind the Lava fall that way, please collect it first. The Hidden Treasure is among the Dragon’s treasures.

Sungjin was reminded of something as he spoke.

“Ah! And do not challenge the Hidden boss if you can... Well, most people won’t even want to try anyway but...”

“... Understood.”

Once he was done with the conversation, he used the Trollseeker

marble once more. It was a sudden and unexpected reunion, but he was glad that the misunderstanding was somehow resolved.

Sungjin had now obtained three trustworthy and dependable allies. Sungjin used the Trollseeker marble to hunt trolls in other realms.

Because the raid was composed of ten hunters, the scale of the battle was quite large, or overwhelmingly one-sided. The second teleportation led to a place where the hunters were battling three on three.

Sungjin who arrived on the scene was able to kill two of the three hunters and collect their items. The third place he arrived had two survivors dueling to monopolize the points.

The men had mutually attacked each other, and both had entered troll states. They were fighting with their lives on the line, but the winner, in the end, was Sungjin from another Dimension. When Sungjin separated the two fighters, they saw him as an enemy.

Due to the appearance of an unexpected enemy, the hunters had agreed to a temporary truce, but they were no match for Sungjin. Sungjin killed them both and collected their items.

The fourth dimension only had one troll left.

He didn't know what happened in this realm, but he killed the lone troll and took his item. Sungjin asked the Operator from the fourth raid "Operator, Time remaining?"

[28 minutes and 32 seconds remaining.]

Sungjin spent 2 hours endlessly running, killing, and teleporting.

"Whew... so busy..."

Sungjin was exhausted. But, still he made his way to the Red Dragon's Corpse to use the final marble.

"This is the last one... and then it's finally over."

Finally, he said

“Pursuit of Justice”

A pillar of light appeared and enveloped Sungjin. Once Sungjin was teleported, he tried to look for the other hunters again. But instead, he was facing Khal Gal who was sleeping on his hands.

Sungjin did a double take and took a step back. He wasn't close enough to wake the dragon yet, and the Dragon continued to sleep. Sungjin thought to himself, 'What is going on? How is this possible...? Wait, did the trolls act before they even took on the boss?'

This was not an impossible event. Trolls like 'Friar'

'If he dies, I act. If he lives, I do nothing'

Carefully planned out their trolling, whereas others were closer to 'You pissed me off. Die'

They didn't think of gains or losses and simply acted out on emotional impulse. Of course if this happens before the boss fight, it becomes nothing short of suicide.

'I thought something like this could happen on a rare occasion, but...'

It was still shocking to experience it for real.

'Then just where are they? The surviving hunters?'

Sungjin cautiously walked back towards the entrance of the cavern, taking care not to awaken Khal Gal, and began his search. But he didn't have to travel far.

The remaining hunters were huddled together right at the bend before the cavern. Sungjin quickly counted them.

'One, two, three, four...'

Four hunters remained. They had given up even attempting to raid and sat in place. Sungjin approached them.

“What are you guys doing? Why are you sitting here?”

They were shocked to see Sungjin.

“Eh...? What?”

“Adjudicator? You weren’t here at the start”

Sungjin didn’t answer but threw his own question.

“Don’t worry about me... but what happened? What are you all doing here?”

The four hunters wordlessly stared at the ground. Finally, one of the hunters let out a withering sigh. Sungjin could see the despair on their faces.

Even Sungjin had felt intimidated when facing the Dragon with all ten members of his party intact.

But the remaining members of this party were just four, not even half the original number of hunters. They felt hopeless, he knew without a doubt. They would die if they challenged the dragon, or if they simply waited out the timer; their end would be the same. Sungjin asked them “A troll appeared here right? And that’s why the number shrank so much? So where are they?”

One of the hunters replied

“Troll? Yeah, there was one. He died by our hands.”

He gestured with his chin. There was a corpse of another hunter in the distance. While Sungjin was being summoned, the other hunters must have finished him off. Sungjin asked him “So why did he end up trolling?”

Once again, the hunters became mute at his question. Sungjin became impatient and swung his sword in the air before saying “Answer me. If you give me a good answer, I will save you all.”

Two of the four hunters looked up to stare at Sungjin.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know who you are, but do you think you can kill that

dragon?”

Sungjin stared at them before deciding to lie.

“I am someone who appears before those who lose their will to continue... a helper.”

“Helper?”

Now everyone was staring at him.

“Yes Helper. You all were thinking that it was over for you guys, right? And that’s why you’re just sitting there, right?”

Everyone fell silent once more at his words. But the reason behind their silence was different. This time, the silence was because Sungjin was right on the mark. Sungjin swung his swords once more and said “I will ask you one more question. Are there any other trolls? If you answer, I will slay the dragon on your behalf.”

Chapter 110 – Red Dragon's Lair (16)

No one responded to him. Saying

‘I will slay the dragon on your behalf.’

must have not appeared feasible in their eyes. Sungjin glanced around. Luckily, there was a corpse (well, closer to a pile of rubble) of Magma Golem nearby.

Sungjin pulled out Moon Specter and walked up to it. Then, he picked a suitable spot before swinging his sword. The Magma golem's body was cut like a hot knife through butter.

‘Clank’

At the same time, the hunters had their jaws ‘Clank’

Drop to the ground. Sungjin swung his sword around and pointed to his scale armor to say “I already killed that dragon twice now. This armor I am wearing is proof of that. So, I ask once more. Where are the trolls?”

Then someone answered

“Earlier when we were killing mobs... someone missed their mark with an arrow, and a Dragon Demihuman came running towards us. We had to face two Dragon Demihumans at once. Meanwhile, three hunters died in combat... and while the others argued and bickered over whose fault it was, another three died. Yes there was a troll earlier... but there are only the four of us remaining now.”

“Really?”

Sungjin frowned. He had come with the aim of hunting trolls, but there was no troll to be had.

‘Well, I expected this to happen at some point...’

“Haa...”

Sungjin's motivation ebbed, so he sat down in front of the others. There were certainly some raids more difficult than the others, but this raid was feeling especially long.

Cleared the Dragon, found the hidden piece, tested by the dragon's mother, reunite with Serin during troll hunt, and kill the dragon a second time.

‘So many things happened...’

The hunters looked nervous when Sungjin continued to sit in place.

“So...uh... are you really going to kill it for us? That dragon?”

Sungjin looked up at them. They were pitiful people. Anyone less skilled than the previous ‘final 10 survivors’ would find it near impossible to kill that dragon with just four members. If Sungjin chose not to help them, they were guaranteed to go to the Purgatory. But there was also no real benefit for Sungjin to help them.

‘I did promise them but...’

It wasn't easy facing that dragon, even for him. And he would have to fight without the help of Cain or Soldamyr. If he was unlucky, it could become quite dangerous as well. Sungjin couldn't help but seriously reconsider.

‘What should I do? They were originally going to die, should I just let them be?’

Challenging the dragon would require Sungjin put his life on the line. But in return, there was nothing to be gained. One of the hunters seemed to realize what Sungjin was thinking, and began to beg “Please save us”

Once one hunter started pleading, the others joined in.

“Please”

“Sir Helper, please save us”

Sungjin scratched the back of his head. He couldn't say no after hearing their sincere appeal. But, their desperation reminded him of something. Sungjin looked down at the 'Ring of the Warlord'.

'If they willingly and knowingly kiss the ring... I can obtain a white coin.'

They were facing imminent death. There was not a single person who would refuse the ring if it were to save their lives.

"Ah well... A promise is a promise. But... you four must promise as well."

"What kind of...?"

"Kiss my ring before I go to fight him. Just know that you will take a permanent 10% penalty to black coin rewards every raid. What will you do?"

The hunters didn't hesitate to nod.

"I'll do it"

"I'll do it too."

They came up one by one to kiss Sungjin's Ring.

[You will take 10% penalty to all future raid Coin rewards.]

The Operator warned them, but they didn't heed her words. Losing 10% later was supremely preferable to dying now. Thanks to the hunters, Sungjin obtained four additional white coins.

'Perfect... This might actually be a better outcome than if I had killed four Trolls instead...'

Sungjin thought as he prepared to clear the dragon one more time. He first allocated the 23880 stat points he had obtained earlier. He had told himself that he would immediately apply the points as soon as he gets them to boost the bonus Nada and Franz received from 'Chosen One' title, but he had forgotten about it due to running into Serin.

“Operator, apply 5000 to Strength, 5000 to Dexterity, 5000 to Endurance, 5000 to Magic power, and 3880 points to Mind Power.”

[Applied.]

“And then...”

Sungjin took out the Star of the Nameless.

“Rename. To Dragonslayer.”

[Applied.]

Master Hunter title was great, but against Dragons, this title was superior due to the X4 damage bonus.

Sungjin took out his two swords and took a deep breath. And then he was reminded of another item, ‘Aio – Ring of the Great Sage’. Sungjin held it up.

‘Empower magic... should I try it out now?’

The Empower Magic increased his magic power by 5 times for 30 seconds. Sungjin had promised to try it after discussing with Soldamyr, but trying it out now didn’t seem like a bad idea.

‘But if the mana consumption jumps up by five times... the expenditure is going to be immense...’

Sungjin asked the Operator

“Operator, what does my stat look like now?”

Soon Sungjin’s status screen opened up.

Title: Dragon Slayer

HP: 153120 MP: 157840

Strength: 21749 18912 (+2837)

Dexterity: 22532 19593 (+2939)

Endurance: 15312 13315 (+1997)

Magic Power: 12787 11119 (+1668)

Mind Power: 15784 13725 (+2059)

Unallocated Points: 0

When the Hunters saw the status screen, their jaws dropped once more. They seemed even more surprised than when they had seen him slice apart the Magma Golem's body. Sungjin didn't mind them as he quickly did math in his head.

‘Five times the current magic power...’

Then the magic power would surpass 60,000. And with such high value of magic power, there was only one spell he could use. The 2nd Circle spell Frost Bite.

‘Well... since there's nothing else I could have used anyway... I guess I could try it out now.’

Sungjin finished his preparations for the fight and walked towards the dragon. The hunters watched him leave as they asked “So... what should we do?”

Sungjin faced them and said

“If you're not in danger, feel free to use ranged attacks.”

“Ok.”

“Yes”

Sungjin, once again, walked into the cavern of Khal Gal. The dragon of this dimension was still sleeping.

He prepared his swords

“Whew...”

And took a deep breath before beginning his charge towards the Dragon. Hearing someone run towards him roused the dragon. Upon seeing Sungjin, it said “Hmm? What's this? You? How did you obtain an armor made of the scales of my brethren?”

‘It's actually your own scales’

Sungjin thought as he ran towards the Dragon.

“Well... whatever die.”

A half-asleep Khal Gal was not very threatening. His arrogant personality also made his attacks slow(at least in comparison to later on) and the attack pattern was simplistic.

Most importantly, this was the fourth time (once before regressing, three times this round) they fought. An enemy he was now very familiar with. Sungjin was already used to Khal Gal's attacks.

He expertly dodged the dragon's attack and swung his blade. But “Ahhh!”

The effects were far better than he had expected. It was probably because the ‘Dragonslayer’ title was the most effective title to use against Dragons. After a few strikes from his blade, Khal Gal ran away by flying into the air.

“I'll burn you all!”

Sungjin already knew what he was trying to do; Khal Gal was readying his breath attack.

‘Aio... should I try it now?’

Sungjin reached out with his hands towards Khal Gal and said “Empower Magic.”

The Ring on his finger suddenly lit up as the material contained within began to glow with blinding lights. Meanwhile, Sungjin began to feel a change.

His mind felt like it was becoming cloudy, yet focused. And although it wasn't tangible, he could feel a tremendous amount of power settle inside his body.

‘Is this... the effects of Empower Magic?’

Sungjin immediately followed up by shouting towards Khal Gal “Binding Frost! Frostbite!”

And an unbelievable amount of cold left his hands. The magma

instantly hardened in place, and Khal Gal who was hit head on by the wave of cold air flapped a few more times before freezing up and plummeting towards the ground.

‘Boom!’

Sungjin looked down to stare at his hands which released the cold.

‘What the...’

The numerical value was increased by five times, but the effects seemed to be more than five times as powerful. Khal Gal was surprised likewise. So he forced his unresponsive chin to say “You....Hu...man...how....”

Sungjin decided to finish him off for now. The Dragon’s lower half had completely frozen solid while in mid-air before, and he was unable to break free. Sungjin shouted as he ran up to the dragon “Frenzy”

Besgoro’s vision turned red, and Sungjin’s blades began to move faster and faster. And it only increased.

Khal Gal desperately tried to escape, but after being hit by a spell produced by the ridiculously high value of Magic Power, he was unable to put up even an iota of resistance before he died where he landed. From the other hunters’ cubes, Sungjin heard [Congratulations. Boss Monster]

[Red Dragon Khal Gal is cleared.]

Sungjin who defeated Khal Gal for the third time, “Whew...”

Let out a short sigh.

‘I am getting stronger aren’t I’

He felt this more clearly in this round than any other before. The first time he faced Khal Gal, the dragon was barely overcome after a difficult fight. But on the third fight, he had defeated the dragon without the dragon being able to respond in any way.

The growth of stats, Dragon Scale Armor, and the Dragonslayer Title all contributed greatly, but the most memorable was the effectiveness of the ‘Aio – Ring of the Great Sage’.

Since it single-handedly took down a dragon with a 2nd circle spell.

‘If... I can just find out how to use this effectively...’

Just like Ariane said, it might be enough to change his destiny. Sungjin turned the ring around in place. He wanted to watch the material floating on the inside.

But the other hunters came running at him, hugging and yelling “Thank you!”

“We are saved thanks to you, Dragonslayer!”

“You are my savior!”

“Thank you so much! Thank you!”

Sungjin became surrounded like a victorious baseball coach. This marked the end of the long and exhausting exploration of the Dragon’s Lair.

Chapter 111 – Black Market 10th Shopping

Sungjin was teleported to the Black Market along with a bright pillar of light. It was the most tiring raid he had ever been through.

‘I can’t believe I had to clear the same boss three times...’

Sungjin took his seat in Xiu Ran’s First Drop. The Operator then said to him, [Congratulations. To all the Hunters who have overcame the 10 man raid Red Dragon’s Lair]

Sungjin sat up and looked at the Cube.

[The next Raid will take place two days from now. Please rest for today and tomorrow and revitalize yourselves.]

‘Ah... that’s right.’

There were two days of rest period before the next raid. In his previous life, he was so out of his mind with trying to survive that he didn’t really pay much attention, but he remembered now that he thought of it. Xiu Ran walked up to Sungjin who settled down on his seat.

“What should I get you, Mr Hunter?”

Sungjin pondered his choices for a moment. Sungjin had been in the sweltering heat of the volcano with free flowing lava until a moment ago. His cheeks were still burning from the heat of the volcano. Sungjin asked her “Do you have Cola here?”

“Yes, we do.”

“Then Cola Please. With large sized ice.”

“Okay Coming right up”

Xiu Ran brought a glass of Cola filled half way up with blocks of ice. Sungjin greedily gulped it down.

“Haa... much better.”

Drinking an iced drink seem to blow away all the heat and

fatigue. Sungjin kept the drink next to him as he begun to inspect the items he had earned this round.

“Operator, give me all the items that I earned this round... except the Fruit of Evolution and the Enhancement stones.”

The Operator soon dumped the items into a large pile. Sungjin glanced over the items and realized ‘Oh yeah... there were... few more things.’

He still had the Dragon Heart and ‘Mu – Pen of Reply’. He couldn’t check the heart due to running into Ariane, and the pen as he was busy saving Serin from trolls and missed the chance.

Sungjin picked the two items out of the pile and placed them separately on the table. The first one he picked up was the Dragon’s Heart. It had the exterior akin to blackened stone, but the surface was smooth. Sungjin picked it up, and the Operator soon displayed the information screen.

Dragon’s Heart – Origin of Mana

Legendary Crafting Material

Heart which supplies the Dragon with an immense amount of mana; it is extremely valuable due to being considered the highest grade mineral.

There are only a few blacksmiths in the world who can work with this material.

Sungjin immediately thought of Kargos when he read the information.

‘Few Blacksmiths or not, he’s the only one in the Black Market so...’

Sungjin placed the item into the cube for now. The only thing remaining was the pen. Ariane who had given him the pen had told him ‘Try using this. I don’t know if this will give you a hint though.’

Followed by

‘It was fun, Human. I hope that my presents will help you escape your tragic fate.’

Sungjin picked up the pen as he mumbled

“Just how is this supposed to help...”

He couldn’t really understand it. Unlike ‘Aio – Ring of the Great Sage’, it didn’t look like it could be of use in combat. Sungjin lifted up the pen.

Mu – Pen of Reply

Normal Pen

Writing Spell (I) – Writes the stored message. Once the message is written, it loses the ability.

A pen used when conveying a message

That is difficult to say out loud.

‘... what the hell, it’s normal grade.’

Sungjin was slightly disappointed. He was fairly sure it wouldn’t be useful in combat, but he was still hoping he was wrong.

‘Well, whatever the case is... I should check the stored message.’

Sungjin picked up one of the Napkins on the table. The napkin in ‘First Drop’ seemed stiff enough to write on with a pen. He put the pen on top of the napkin and said “Writing Spell”

The pen began to move by itself. Sungjin let go of the pen, and the pen wrote ‘He who searches for answers finds questions...’

But the message was surprisingly familiar.

‘And he who searches for questions finds answers.’

Sungjin read the completed message and thought of the ‘Darker than Black’ Merchant. The man had definitely uttered this from time to time. Sungjin started at the pen. It continued to write.

‘4:30 in the morning, head to the 3rd district, last building on the right, underground.’

Once it was done writing, the pen fell haplessly to its side. It must have completed its function. Sungjin checked the final few words it had written on the napkin. Then he muttered to himself “What is this...”

This pen was most definitely writing the instructions on how to get to ‘Darker than Black’ Merchant.

‘Well... it really IS one way to change one’s fate...’

Problem was that Sungjin already knew about this particular thing. He remembered a bit about the past.

‘When I first heard about this hidden merchant... it was... one raid before the last one I participated in...’

Memories came flooding back to Sungjin. For a moment he relived the past.

‘I tried going there at night, and it was there.’

‘Really?’

‘Really. It even sold items that lets you cross into other dimensions.’

‘Other dimensions? How?’

‘How should I know? He said... something like chasing trolls that reside in the other dimensions?’

‘But there’s only ten of us left already. What’s the point of travelling to another dimension?’

‘Well, that’s true...’

The one who had told Sungjin about it was definitely “Edward...”

It was Spellmaster Ed. Sungjin stared at the napkin as he thought ‘Wait hold on... that means he had already met Ariane... and won? Then why...’

Ariane had said that the pen might be able to help change his fate. And the Pen's purpose was to show the way to the hidden merchant at Darker than Black. And Sungjin already knew about it. Ariane had said "...I can't tell you any more than that... Mother warned me not to get involved with it."

It meant Sungjin was already aware of the secret Ariane was afraid to utter out loud.

'How did this happen?'

Sungjin felt deeply puzzled about the situation. But it wasn't something he could figure out by thinking alone. If he could go back in time to ask Edward himself, it would lead to something, but that was an unrealistic expectation.

He was already dead. And meeting him again was no good since Ed wouldn't have any memories of the past round.

'First... I should talk to him in the morning. That merchant... he doesn't answer everything I ask but... I can at least show him the napkin.'

Sungjin thought as he placed the pen into the cube and the napkin in his pocket. Then, as usual, he began to inspect his items one by one.

These were the items taken from trolls. The total number of trolls hunted today were 8. There was a total of 16 items earned. There were many trolls due to larger party sizes.

Sungjin checked each and every item. Thanks to the chapters progressing, most of the trolls owned mostly heroic tier items.

'This is 4500 and 5500 coins.'

'This is 6000 to 8000.'

The number of items increased, but the average value of each item rose as well, so it was even more profitable. Meanwhile "Eh?"

Among the items, Sungjin found a Sword he already owned;

another Blood Vengeance.

“When did I pick this up?”

There was a reason why Sungjin didn't notice it immediately. It was due to the sword's scabbard. Someone had altered (Kargos offered this service) the color of the scabbard. Only the color had changed; the contents and the specs remained the same as his own Blood Vengeance.

‘If it is the same item... I could use it for upgrades!’

Sungjin thought to himself and so didn't assign a price for the item. He didn't know if items could be mixed with enchantment stones in upgrades.

But there was a high chance that Blood Vengeance, which was sold in the regular shop, was owned by other hunters as well (and he had seen someone else carry Blood Vengeance already).

Sungjin put a memo about every item other than Blood Vengeance and placed them into the cube.

He had done this often enough to the point that he was able to generally gauge the worth of an item by just glancing over it. Once he was done pricing all the items he had, he headed towards the auction house.

When he arrived, he simply handed over the list he had written and said “Please price them as listed.”

He handed over the items en masse.

“Understood, Dear Hunter.”

They bowed deeply towards him. In truth, Sungjin was a major player (since he is the only one able to place more than ten items up for auction per round) in the auction house.

Once he was done taking care of business, Sungjin decided to drop by Kargos's Smithy before he headed towards Ninety Nine Nights. He wanted to ask about crafting using ‘Dragon's Heart’ and

to use up his 'Enhancement Stones'. But he remembered something.

'Now that I think of it...'

Sungjin returned to the Auction house to ask the pigmen "Hey, are there any Blood Vengeance put up for auction? It's a Legendary class Sword."

No two identical items could be purchased in the Black market with the exception of consumables.

But if it was used by another hunter, he could buy it and use it for upgrade purposes. But the Pigmen checked the listing and shook his head.

"There are none, Mr Hunter."

'Ah... I see...'

"Should I send a message to you in case one is put up later?"

"That'd be good."

Sungjin said absentmindedly. But then he thought

'What if... I used Franz Nada and Serin...?'

Enhancement stones were a very difficult item to obtain. It was not sold anywhere in the market. But on the other hand, Blood Vengeance could be (at least once) purchased by anyone with more than 9800 coins.

Since he already had one from earlier, if he could obtain just two more, he would be able to upgrade it right away. Trading with 'Chosen One' would definitely work.

'So there's that method.'

Sungjin made a fist and hit his open palm on the other hand. Then he would be able to use his three Enhancement stones from this round on Artemio.

'That will work.'

Sungjin thought as he made his way towards Kargos's smithy. Kargos was sitting on a chair smoking through a pipe. He saw Sungjin and said "Yo, Looking healthy, Dual Wielding Swordsman Hunter. So, how was the upgraded Moon Specter?"

Sungjin replied

"It was beyond my wildest imagination."

Moon Specter whispered to him

'Please let him know I am extremely thankful to him for returning my voice to me.'

Sungjin then said

"Moon Specter is thankful as well."

Kargos looked slightly bashful as he said

"Yeah well... it was something you commissioned for anyway."

Sungjin smiled and said

"Anyway, I have work I would like for you to do."

"Oh? What is it?"

Sungjin took the Dragon Heart out of the cube as he said "You know what this is, right? Kargos?"

But Sungjin didn't need any reply. The moment Sungjin had pulled the heart out of the cube, Kargos's eyes grew wide in surprise.

Chapter 112 – Black Market Tenth Shopping (2)

Kargos asked Sungjin with huge eyes.

“Isn’t this... the Dragon’s Heart?”

He could recognize the heart with a single glance. Sungjin answered “Yes, this is Dragon’s Heart.”

Kargos was unable to take his eyes off the heart as he asked “Where did you get this?”

Sungjin answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

“From the Dragon’s Lair. The Raid this time was Red Dragon’s lair, didn’t you know?”

But Kargos shrugged as if this was the first he’s heard the news.

“Really? I didn’t know.”

Sungjin tilted his head.

“I thought all the merchants knew where each of the raids took place...?”

“That’s because everyone else gossips.”

“And you?”

“I, well, I only speak to my hammer and anvil.”

Somehow it seemed fitting.

“Ah, I see... Well, anyway... are you able to craft anything with this?”

“Craft... yeah, it’s possible if I give it my all. But what kind of form would you like?”

Sungjin tilted his head again.

“Form?”

“Yes, form. Like Weapons, Armors or accessories. You can pick any kind of weapon. Armor could be made according to which piece you want.”

He picked up the heart which was slightly larger than a man’s fist as he said “With this much... it’s too little to make a breastplate or armored pants, but I should be able to make most forms of weapons.

Sungjin thought that the best option for now was a defensive item. He decided to ask “What kind of armor would work best?”

“I think a Shield or a Helm would work best”

Sungjin repeated what he heard.

“Shield or Helm...”

As soon as helm was mentioned Besgoro urgently began to speak.

‘Oy Kei, you aren’t thinking of leaving me behind and making some replacement item, are you? Right? I can cast magic for you as well as increase your attack speed; you know that right? Last time we fought against the dragon, I was the MVP! I hope you didn’t forget...’

Sungjin stopped him

“Okay okay. If you stay quiet, I’ll make something else.”

Kargos raised his eyebrows at Sungjin’s words (which probably sounded like Sungjin was talking to himself).

“Hmm?”

Sungjin raised both his hands and said “Ah... it’s nothing.”

Sungjin considered other pieces of armors. Shield was no good since he had to hold his weapons on each hands. Sungjin asked Kargos “Aren’t gauntlets or boots fine as well?”

Kargos shook his head.

“No, The Dragon’s Heart can only give its full effect as a single

unbroken item. If you break it into half, the power drops to a quarter or below.

“What about an accessory?”

“Well you might be able to wear it around like a belt buckle for accessory, but wouldn’t that be too unsightly? If you have something this size hanging from the front of your pants?”

He was right. If something like that was swinging about as he swung his swords, it would be distracting.

“What about shaving off a bit of it?”

Kargos shouted loudly as if Sungjin had said something incredibly offensive.

“Most definitely not!”

Sungjin stared back in surprise.

“I told you earlier that the Dragon’s Heart’s effects depend on its weight. If you shave it off, it’s the same as shaving off its stats.”

Sungjin fell into a dilemma. But he knew that with the amount of material he had, the only piece of armor he could get made which could be worn with equal weight distribution from left to right side of his body was limited to a helm. However, Besgoro was already taking up that spot.

Although Besgoro’s comments were unbearable from time to time, it was undeniable that Besgoro was also incredibly useful.

‘What should I do...’

Sungjin considered his options for a moment before replying “Then... Shield... but I have never had nor used a shield before. I am more comfortable blocking with swords instead.”

Kargos suggested

“Then... Why not make another sword?”

“Sword?”

“Yes, Sword.”

Sungjin glanced down at his belt; he already had three swords hanging from it. But Kargos pointed towards the left side where Moon Specter hung alone and said “Since you have two on the right, shouldn’t you add one more on that side to match the balance?”

“Well... if you consider this from strictly numerical point of view...”

“And this Dragon’s Heart... the effects are... increasing the mana of the wielder.”

Sungjin listened quietly.

“I see.”

“So I’m thinking, why not make a specialized weapon for magic?”

“Specialized for magic?”

“Yes, a sword for magic. From what I see, you have weapons with different specializations. The worn out sword carries the spirit of the lady, the sword stinking of blood is specialized to deal damage. And the last Scimitar is a kind of anti-magic weapon, is it not?”

“How did you...”

“I can tell by looking. Aren’t you switching out your swords depending on the situation already?”

“That... Yes, it’s true.”

“So. You should probably be okay with having one more, right? A sword meant to be used when casting spells. Since your swordsmanship is among the best, you should be able to switch them out easily during a fight, right?”

Sungjin carefully considered his suggestion. He came to the conclusion that it would be okay to have one more sword.

“Then... I’ll make another sword.”

“Yes yes, I think that’s for the best as well.”

“Then... how long would it take to make the sword?”

“It would take... two days. And 10,000 Black Coins.”

Sungjin nodded.

“Yes, I understand.”

“Then do you have any other request for me?”

Sungjin put down Artemio and said

“I also want to enhance this one.”

“Really? And enhancement stones? I told you before, but it takes three more stones to upgrade legendary class items.”

Sungjin placed his hand on his cube.

“Operator?”

The cube flew closer to him. Sungjin removed three Enhancement Stones from within and handed it over. Kargos looked slightly surprised.

“My, you already gathered three more?”

“A Dragon’s horde contains a large amount of treasure, you know.”

“Ooh... I see I see...”

Kargos received them and said

“Then for these... come back tomorrow. And the cost is 10,000 as always.”

“I guess it doesn’t matter that you’re already working on making a new sword?”

“Yes, since it takes over a day to melt the Dragon’s Heart anyway.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Yes. So when you come tomorrow, this scimitar... what’s the name again?”

“Artemio.”

“Yes, I’ll have Artemio’s upgraded version, and the next morning I’ll have the new magic sword ready for you.”

Sungjin bowed at his words.

“I understand. Then I’ll leave it in your capable hands.”

Sungjin headed to bed once he arrived at Ninety Nine Nights.

He had originally planned to discuss with Soldamyr about Aio – ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ (since it would allow Sungjin to use every kind of blue magic, but Sungjin was ignorant as to what spells were available) but once he arrived home, he was too tired and did not feel like discussing it then.

Sungjin lay on the bed as he checked the time.

“Operator, what’s the time?”

[3:22:58 PM]

He had promised to meet with Serin at 4 pm.

‘I don’t have much time to rest.’

“Please set the alarm for 30 minutes from now.”

[Understood.]

Sungjin closed his eyes as soon as the alarm was set. Although he was busy today, he would be able to rest aplenty tomorrow.

‘I should take a day off tomorrow and look for good eateries.’

The Black Market was filled with small cafes and restaurants like ‘Xiu Ran’s First Drop’. Dalupin was able to cook food from any country, but each of the restaurants had their own take on technique and menu, making it worthwhile to try out different

places.

‘Now that I think about it... it would be nice... to go somewhere with Nada and Serin too...’

There was no better place for dates than the Black Market, since everything unrelated to combat was free. Due to being forced to fight everyday in raids with his life on the line and having been isolated from other people for so long, he was unable to think of it sooner.

‘Well, it’s not impossible at least. I don’t know how it would actually go...’

Sungjin slipped into sleep while thinking so. And then [Mr. Hunter, 30 minutes have passed.]

Sungjin stood up after hearing the Operator. His hair was disheveled when he woke up. Sungjin absentmindedly fixed his hair.

He didn’t spend much time worrying about his appearance, but when considering the fact that he was going to meet Serin who was a high-class beauty, he naturally came to feel that he should at least avoid the worst. While he was looking into the mirror and fixing his hair, the Operator gave him an announcement.

[A Chosen One has requested your summon. Will you accept?]

[10, 9]

Before 2 seconds passed, Sungjin gave his answer to the Operator.

[Yeah]

And he was teleported away.

The place he was summoned to was a cosy cafe with a calm and graceful atmosphere. If ‘First Drop’ was a small cafe meant to down tea quickly before heading out, this place was more intended to be enjoyed leisurely for an hour or two while holding a

conversation.

‘I didn’t know a place like this existed...’

While Sungjin was taking a look around, Serin spoke from across the seat.

“This place is good, right? I found it recently while roaming the markets. It has great atmosphere and has great coffee and confectionaries.”

“I see...”

Sungjin nodded as he turned to look at her. It was the first time he was meeting her outside of the raids. He felt awkward. He felt like he had to say something quickly. He began to squeeze his brain for words.

‘Hmm... What did I say when I told her to call me...?’

Sungjin had asked Serin to call him over so he could explain various this to her. Why he chose her, what effects it had. And what was his end goal etcetera.

Sungjin was just about to begin speaking to her when she took the initiative.

“I had a bunch of questions.”

Instead of saying what he was going to, he replied to her.

“Ah ok. Please ask. What did you want to ask?”

Sungjin had thought she would want to ask about the ‘Chosen One’ title. But her question was something entirely outside of his expectations.

“How old are you?”

Sungjin hesitated for a moment, but he decided to answer.

“I am... twenty-seven.”

“Oh really? Then I am one year younger since I am twenty-six.”

“Ah is that so?”

Serin was a world-famous sports star, but Sungjin had never paid much attention to the celebrities. So he had no idea what her age was.

“Yes, so... Can I call you Oppa? From now on?”

Sungjin nodded.

“Ah yes... please, by all means”

So in Korean, there is formal speech (reserved for adults, strangers, and people of respect) and informal speech (with friends, juniors, or people who are socially below you). Sungjin had always spoken with formal speech with everyone. Serin found out that Sungjin was older and asked him to treat her like a junior, which he feels extremely awkward doing. Also, her speech pattern goes from formal/uptight/stiff to increasingly gentle and friendly.

The place marked in the chapter is exactly the LAST sentence Sungjin is allowed to speak formally, and she forces him to address her informally (and treat her like a junior or dongseng). Which is to say, she asked him to treat her like someone close to him.

And in KR, this is significant, because it indicates shift from stranger/acquaintance relationship to that of a budding romance

“Oppa, please don’t be so formal, I am a year junior.”

She seemed so cold and proper earlier, but for their third meeting, she was being very gentle. Sungjin felt extremely awkward and leaned forward to take a sip of the coffee to fill the gap and give himself time to think.

‘I didn’t think she was this kind of person...’

Chapter 113 – Black Market Tenth Shopping

(3)

“Cough...”

Sungjin let out a fake cough twice. He was caught off guard by Serin’s sudden change in attitude.

“Ah, as you... I mean okay I’ll avoid formal speech from now on.”

“Please do, Oppa.”

Being called Oppa felt extremely awkward. So Sungjin tried to speak more to conceal his discomfort.

“So earlier... someone called because of emergency. It was another ‘Chosen One’ like you, and she was in danger.”

“Ah yes... I... I saw that too.”

But Serin had a dark expression as she spoke. Sungjin recalled the situation earlier.

‘Hey, Mr Boobs. You said to call for you when I’m in trouble right? I am in trouble.’

He put his hand on his forehead.

‘Oh right...’

No matter how he thought of it, the situation did not paint a good picture for him. Sungjin quickly changed the subject.

“So well... How was it? How did it go for you since the time we split up at the Canyon?”

“I gathered the book like you said, Oppa. All three volumes, and combined them.”

She took a book out of her pocket. The cover read “Thousand and One Nights”.

‘Just as I thought... she was the one who made it.’

He had thought of this possibility. She continued to explain.

“After I got the 2nd part, I gathered more coins. I saved up five thousand coins pretty quickly, but I waited a bit more before buying. And meanwhile when I was checking the auction house...”

Sungjin finished her words for her.

“And you bought a mystery pouch, right?”

“Oh my, how did you know?”

“I was the one who put it up for sale.”

“Really?”

Serin’s eyes grew wide and gathered her lips into an O shape. Sungjin thought ‘So you can make faces like that too’

She had a poker face the entire time Sungjin had seen her before, but now she was acting just like a normal mid-twenties lady.

He had seen her face in posters and advertisements (for makeup or sportswear) giving a charismatic smile, but he got a glimpse of her real self. Sungjin replied as calmly as he could.

“Yes. You can tell by the title of the person who put it up for sale. Wasn’t it Master Hunter?”

“No. I bought it from... Treasure Hunter...”

Sungjin retraced his steps in his memory. He had enough spec and had been using Treasure Hunter title around that time.

“Ah... Yeah, Treasure Hunter is still me. I sometimes switch up my titles.”

“Ahh...”

“So you got a 1st or 3rd part from there.”

“Yes. I was really nervous, but I was lucky enough to overcome the 1/3 chance of getting the same part. I received the 1st part from the pouch, so I bought the 3rd part from the goat merchant to complete the book.”

“Yeah? How is the effect?”

“Good. It’s usually strong enough to beat most bosses with ease. And... if we felt confident we’d attempt hidden bosses.”

“Really? What bosses were you able to defeat?”

“Dark Elf Village and the Magician’s Ivory tower, those two.”

Now that he saw, she was wearing the ‘Chimerao – Ring of Fused Beasts’ on her finger. Seeing her wear the same ring made it feel like they were wearing a couple’s ring.

“I see...”

Sungjin nodded.

“And this raid, I somehow ran into trolls... But once we got to the location with the Hidden Piece...”

“Hidden Piece... What did you do with the Dragon’s Heart?”

“Ah that... I decided to make a quiver. The old Blacksmith man said it’d imbue mana into my arrows...”

Sungjin continued to exchange words with Serin about the raids. It was awkward at first, but he felt his relationship with Serin had grown deeper. Meanwhile, she then asked “Now that I think of it... Oppa told me then...”

“Mmm? What did I say?”

“That if we meet again, you’ll tell me your real name.”

Sungjin nodded.

“Oh yeah, that’s true.”

“So? What is it, your name?”

Sungjin breathed in, and for the first time since he regressed back in time, he told someone his real name.

“Sungjin.”

“Sungjin?”

“Yes.”

“Last name?”

“That’s...”

Sungjin pursed his lips. When he looked at the wide-eyed Serin, he suddenly remembered why he even bothered to use an alias and hide his identity.

“About that... I’ll tell you once the raids are over.”

“Why?”

The reason why he decided to use an alias was simple; using his real name would only make them closer. And watching someone close die made the pain so much worse.

In his previous raid run, Sungjin had told his name to everyone he was friendly with. But most of them ‘Sungjin... this is it for me... Save yourself!’

‘Save me! Sungjin!’

‘Sungjin run!’

Had died while screaming out his name. So this is why he didn’t want to tell anyone his real name at all. There was something strange about names; knowing and calling each other by names had a strange power that brought people closer.

On the other hand, using an alias would keep a certain distance from others. So Sungjin had been avoiding saying his name to others. Until now. Sungjin looked into Serin’s eyes and said “Well...”

Sungjin thought

‘I don’t want to watch you die while screaming out my name’

But couldn’t say it and instead said

“I have a circumstance.”

“Circumstance?”

“...You’ll find out as you continue through the raids.”

Sungjin didn’t think very deeply as he said this, but Serin picked up on something and said “...It’s weird though. Oppa always... speaks as if you’ve done all of this before.”

Sungjin’s eyes grew wide

“Me?”

“Yes. Even at the time we first met... and even now...”

Sungjin flinched slightly but

‘Before regression, I was the final remaining hunter and have been given a second chance.’

He couldn’t tell her that. He tried his best not to let his feelings show.

“Well... I guess it could look that way. Since I am strong. But who could have guessed things would have turned out this way?”

But then she added

“Liar.”

“What?”

She pushed her long hair out of the way to show Sungjin her ear. Past her long flowing hair was a purplish earring adorning her lobes.

‘Eye of Jeremiah!’

Sungjin couldn’t help but drop his jaws. The Earring was none other than an item that allows the user to read the minds of the other.

“You know what this is, right? Since Oppa is wearing one as well.”

Sungjin couldn’t respond and froze in place.

“I touched it just before I asked the question. I am sorry for

reading your thoughts, Oppa. I didn't want to use it..."

Sungjin grasped his forehead. She had told him earlier that she had defeated the Dark Elven Village's hidden boss. If she was able to clear that map so thoroughly, she had a high chance of discovering the hidden piece as well.

"But think of it. Being strong is one thing. You ran forward and killed the boss as soon as the raid started, then knew that a hidden boss was hiding somewhere on the map; it was all too suspicious. And then you even knew about the existence of the mask, the book. And now dimensional travel? You knew far too much for someone going through it the first time."

"So how far did you read my mind."

"Until the part where you said you were the final survivor and was given a second chance."

If she had heard until there, she already knew the most important parts. Sungjin's 'regression' was discovered. She continued to speak while Sungjin kept his hands on his forehead.

"But, I mean... you didn't need to keep it a secret. It's not a demerit to say you were the final survivor. You came back and are still doing your best to finish this raid, Oppa."

Sungjin thought of what she said. Certainly, she was not wrong if the person he was telling his secret was someone he could trust with his life. She brought her pointer finger to her lips and said "Then that means... in the last raid... I died once already...?"

Sungjin just gave up and told her.

"Yes. You would have died. I don't know how far you got... but even I died. As the last human to lose."

"I see..."

She nodded twice. She remained calm despite hearing the truth. Knowing that she had died once, or the fact that this raid was

being repeated for the second time did not seem to shock her.

‘Then... I guess I don’t need to keep it a secret.’

The biggest reason why Sungjin had kept the regression a secret was first and foremost because he had thought no one would believe him. Second, he thought everyone would think that he was strange. Third, because hearing that this is not the first time the raid is going on might come as a shock.

But she had believed him 100%; she had already thought he was strange. And she was evidently unaffected by the truth. Sungjin decided to tell her “Well, please keep it a secret from others. You’re fine... but it could come as a shock to others.”

“Ok, Oppa.”

“And I told you last time, but the number of people in the raid will continue to fall as it progresses. Well, having lots of people would be great... but we can’t save everyone.”

Serin nodded. She should have witnessed many deaths until now.

“That happened last time. 1000 remained, then a 100, then 50, and so on, the number of people kept on dropping until the final 10. There were only 10 of us left... but there was an internal friction, and we ended up failing.”

Serin listened to Sungjin silently.

“So, my plans are as follows. Find strong and trustworthy teammates to form the final 10 and breakthrough the last raid. In other words, pick those who are to become the ‘Chosen Ones’, like how I have chosen you.”

Listening to Sungjin, Serin pointed to the title above her head.

“Well, this title is amazing for sure. Thanks to Oppa’s stats being so high, with this... I don’t think I’ll have to worry about dying for a long time. As long as I am not extremely unlucky.”

“If you are unlucky, you can just call me.”

“Ah, right. I see.”

“Yes. And as you saw... there are two more Chosen Ones other than you. I would like for all of us to meet if possible but...”

Sungjin thought of Darker Than Black for a moment. There he might find a solution to his problem.

“I’ll try to find that out on my end. Anyway, I’ll be continuing to looking for people to pick; People who are strong and dependable so that we can finish the raid together.”

Serin suddenly said

“I see. I think that’s a wonderful idea, Oppa.”

Sungjin took a sip of coffee and said

“I mean... well... this was the best that I could come up with.”

“I see. Is there anything I could be helping you with?”

“First, become strong. The stronger you are, the stronger our team will be.”

“Okay, and?”

What Sungjin just said was something very obvious, as even her survival depended on it. Sungjin tried to think deeper. Something she could help him with. Then, Besgoro who had been silent all this time finally spoke up.

‘What do you say, Kei? Ask her to summon you at night. You need a way to destress after the raid...’

Sungjin immediately took him off. Sungjin had forgotten about him due to his long silence. He must have been waiting for this kind of timing.

‘Haa... I let my guard down.’

Sungjin let out a sigh and told her

“Something you could help me...”

Now that he thought of it, he recalled that he wanted others to purchase Blood Vengeance on his behalf.

“Last Edge... I have something to take care of there. Let’s move first.”

“Okay, Oppa.”

Serin followed suit and stood up. Sungjin walked into the Black Market with Serin. Then Sungjin remembered “Oh yeah, Serin. By the way...”

Serin looked up towards Sungjin.

“If you ever see someone by the name Adrian or Ed, even if you have to resort to shooting him in the back and become a troll for a round, please kill him. He’s blonde and uses magic. His title is probably... Spell Master.”

“Spell Master Ed... But why?”

Sungjin’s face became rigid as he said

“That guy... fired magic on his allies’ back at the last second.”

Chapter 114 – Black Market Tenth Shopping (4)

Sungjin walked with Serin together towards the ‘Last Edge’. Serin continued to ask Sungjin about various things along the way.

“He fired spells on his own teammates in the past?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“You might already know from experience... but people don’t tend to make rational decisions here. Many aren’t able to prioritize the good of the group, and instead, covet momentary and immediate benefits for themselves. Or worse put their pride above logic or reason and kill out of spite, even if they know it might lead to their own death.”

“Mmm... So Oppa was swept up in his betrayal and died?”

“Mmhmm”

“Hmm...”

Serin pursed her lips and fell into deep thought.

‘I didn’t think I’d ever be able to tell this to someone.’

Sungjin thought as he continued to walk down the road. Meanwhile, Serin asked again.

“What is this Ed person like? How was he?”

“He was a good man.”

Serin was surprised to hear Sungjin’s answer.

“Excuse me?”

Sungjin repeated himself.

“He was a really great guy. Seriously. Gentle, smart, thorough...

there was nothing bad to be said about him. That is, before that raid began.”

“Really?”

“Yes”

“But why did that kind of person do such a thing?”

“I guess you can’t judge a book by its cover.”

“I don’t understand... at all...”

Sungjin felt the same. He wanted to ask Ed why he chose to do what he did, but Ed was killed by the mobs after casting his spell.

Even if they met, he would not remember what he had done; Sungjin would never know why Ed decided to troll at that moment.

“How were the rest of the final 10 members?”

“They were really strong. I was the best with the sword among them... but that doesn’t mean I was special in any way. Everyone was good at their own respective specializations.”

“Really?”

“Yes, the fact that I was the final one to die was simply due to luck. When Spellmaster Ed fired his magic, I was slightly away from the group. So Ed was caught by monsters and died... and I was the final hunter to put up resistance before I was also killed.”

“Hmm...”

The two had arrived at the Last Edge meanwhile. Kenneth greeted the two hunters.”

“Welcome, huntersss”

Sungjin turned to look at the far end of the shop. The spot that was empty in his own dimension was taken up by a Blood Vengeance here.

‘As I thought... it’s there.’

Sungjin told Kenneth

“Could you please get me the Blood Vengeance over there?”

Kenneth obeyed and brought him the sword.

“This is the legendary item Blood Vengeance. Price is 9800 Black Coins.”

But then Kenneth added

“But... A guest hunter is unable to purchase anything from this shop.”

“Ah, I know.”

Sungjin turned to Serin to say

“[Serina](#), can you buy it for me? And then sell it to me for 9800 coins.”

You attach ‘a’ or ‘ya’ after the name to indicate you’re referring to them in a friendly way, usually to someone your junior. It indicates a close relationship. There is no gender restriction (guys to guys, guys to girls, girls to guys, girl to girls). Used for people of equal or lesser social standing.

“Ok, Oppa.”

Serin did as Sungjin asked and stepped forward.

“Please complete the transaction.”

She bought the sword with her own coins. Sungjin said to her “Ah, but please don’t equip it even as a joke. If you equip it, it becomes bound to you.”

“Okay~”

Serin immediately initiated a trade with Sungjin. Blood Vengeance for 9800 Black Coins. Sungjin took the sword after the trade was complete and placed it into his cube.

‘This makes it the 3rd...’

Since he had promised to meet with Franz later, he could just obtain his fourth from him and combine the sword then. Sungjin said to Serin.

“Thanks. With this, I can increase the tier of the weapon one more time.”

“You’re gathering three more Legendary tier items, right? Like the Enhancement stones?”

“Yes. Did you manage to gather any Enhancement stones?”

“I got some from the last raid, so I already requested upgrades. Bow and mantle.”

“Ohh really?”

Meanwhile

[A Chosen One has requested your teleportation. Will you accept the request?]

The Operator asked him again. Serin and Sungjin both turned to look at Sungjin’s cube at the same time. On the cube was Franz’s face.

“Mr Kei. It’s me, Franz.”

Sungjin told Serin

“Ah, this is another one of the Chosen Ones. Just like you.”

“I see... I guess you have to go then?”

“Yeah. Then... let’s meet again tomorrow since tomorrow is a holiday.”

“What time should I call you?”

Sungjin thought for a moment. He had promised to meet Nada at seven tomorrow.

‘If I meet her then... we could eat a meal together.’

He wouldn’t be able to eat two dinners back to back. Sungjin told

Serin “Tomorrow... one o clock. One would be the best.”

“Okay got it, Oppa. Then see you at one.”

“Alright.”

Sungjin then teleported to another dimension. Franz was standing in front of a restaurant in the Black Market. He asked Sungjin “May I ask who was that? That lady?”

He must have meant Serin. Sungjin replied

“Ahh, she’s another one of the Chosen Ones.”

“He~ really? She was a real beauty.”

“Mmm... well, I guess so. So did you decide yet? What to have for dinner?”

“I found a place with good beer and food, so I wanted to head there.”

“Oh? Sounds good, let’s go then.”

Sungjin and Franz arrived together at the pub.

[This is Mono’s ‘Cool and petty’]

The owner was a bulky looking gorilla. He brought them a dish full of large sausages in one hand and two bubbling mugs of beer in the other.

Sungjin and Franz had sausages as a relish with beer. It has been a long time since Sungjin shared a drink over a meal with somebody else.

“So how was it? This raid?”

“Ah not too bad. Thanks to your title we were able to defeat the boss without much trouble and get to the hidden piece. Of course... We couldn’t attempt the hidden boss....”

When they were done eating, they walked over to ‘Last Edge’ together where Franz, like Serin, bought Blood Vengeance on Sungjin’s behalf. Sungjin prepared to return to his own dimension

after the trade was complete.

“Let’s meet tomorrow too since we don’t have anything else to do anyway.”

“When would be a good time to call?”

“Hmm... about three o clock?”

“Eh? But if we meet in time for lunch or dinner...”

“Ah, sorry those time slots are already reserved so I don’t think I can make it. Let’s just have tea after lunch or something.”

“Okay. Then see you again at three, Mr Kei.”

“Yeah. It was a good drink.”

Sungjin left Franz.

“Return.”

When he was teleported, he was sent back to his bedroom at Ninety Nine Nights. Sungjin came downstairs. Dalupin and his summons were waiting for him. Dalupin spoke first.

“Esteemed Hunter, about dinner...?”

“Ah, I already ate. Please feed everyone else.”

“I have already served them at the proper time.”

“I see. Thank you. Also... have any receipts come today?”

“Not yet, sir. It is almost time though...”

Sungjin checked outside. The sun was setting. According to Dalupin, a pigeon demihuman should be arriving wearing a backpack containing the receipts from today’s auction sales. Sungjin asked the Operator “Operator, how many Black coins do I have right now?”

[You have 6965]

“Hmm...”

Sungjin searched his memories. The cost of combining Heroic

Tier Yanhurat was 3000 coins. But Blood Vengeance was a Legendary tier weapon.

‘I am just a bit short of 7000 coins currently, do I have enough?’

It was possible that he didn’t have enough money to combine the items. Instead of making two trips, he decided to stay and wait. There were two things he had to do first anyway.

First was who to give the newly obtained Pulp of Evolution. Second was to find out more about ‘Aio – Ring of the Sage’. Sungjin first called over Soldamyr.

“Soldamyr, come here.”

“Yes, Master.”

Soldamyr floated towards Sungjin’s table. Sungjin removed Aio from his finger and showed it to him.

“This is... great wizard’s...”

When Sungjin was having trouble to find the words, Soldamyr who was always quick witted finished his thoughts for him.

“[Anatol](#).”

The name Anatol means sunrise in Greek.

“Yes, Anatol. It contains his power. When I used it... the effects were really amazing.”

“What does it do exactly?”

“It allows me to use every blue magic... and temporarily raise the magic power by 5 times.”

“Really?”

“Yes. With the level of Mana I had, I could only use a 2nd class magic just once... but the spell was able to freeze up the Red Dragon completely.”

“The Red Dragon?”

“Yes. And that was done while being inside the volcano. It was such an unbelievable power. The numerical value was 5 times... the actual effects seemed to be even more than that.”

Soldamyr replied to Sungjin’s observation.

“By nature, magic gains additional effects the more potent it becomes.”

Then suddenly

‘Ring Ring’

The deliveryman had arrived on a bike. Before Sungjin could say anything, Dalupin went up to the deliveryman and retrieved the receipts to hand it over to Sungjin.

“Thank you.”

Sungjin quickly flipped through the receipts. There were enough that it would take a bit of time to look through them. Sungjin handed over the ring to Soldamyr and said “Anyway, it unlocks all blue magic spells and increases magic power by 5 times; please think of different ways we could use this.”

“Yes, Master.”

Sungjin handed the ring over and checked each receipt before inserting it into the cube. Since most of the items were heroic tier, Sungjin’s income was better than ever.

‘I should be able to afford the elixir tomorrow with this much...’

While Sungjin was thinking that, Soldamyr muttered, “5 times... with a bit of effort, it sounds like that will be possible...”

Sungjin overheard his muttering and asked

“What do you mean by ‘That’?”

“Ah... master”

Soldamyr snapped awake from his deep thoughts.

“Did we not go to the Magic shop together?”

“We did.”

“Didn’t we speak about it? Reversing time?”

“Ah...”

He was right. If the Ring truly unlocked every spell, it meant it also had unlocked the 9th class blue magic spell that could turn back time.

‘Reversing time... how much was the book again?’

He didn’t remember the exact value, but it should have exceeded 150,000 Black Coins alone. Sungjin became even more thankful to Ariane.

Even ignoring the fact that the item could temporarily boost his Magic power by five, the item she had given him was far more valuable than even the spell book worth 150,000 Coins. Taking into consideration all of the 7th and 8th class spells, it was easily worth well over 200,000 coins.

‘I hope that my presents will help you escape your tragic fate’

Sungjin recalled her words. And looking into the darkening sky outside the window, he muttered “Thank you so much, Ariane.”

Chapter 115 – Black Market Tenth Shopping

(5)

‘One two three four...’

Sungjin counted his receipts. There was a total of 10. One of the items he had put up last time as well as 9 of the 15 items he put up for auction today was sold.

Sungjin shoved all ten sheets into the cube at once.

“Operator, how many coins do I have now?”

[You currently have 59065 Black Coins.]

“Hmm really?”

Sungjin lost the sense of scale for the amount of money that he had.

‘So much money after buying two legendary class item like Blood Vengeance... compared to my last life...’

Running around diligently during the raid had paid off.

‘Since I got roughly 50,000 coins from 10 items... each one sold for an average value of 5000. I guess the average worth of items has gone up?’

The cause was twofold. The reason was the trolls now had better items, and the hunters buying items from the auction house generally had more money to spend.

“It was a really good day.”

Sungjin stretched. And

“Haaa~”

He couldn’t help but yawn. Sungjin rubbed his eyes and recalled ‘I said I would fuse Blood Vengeance as soon as I had the money...’

But he didn’t feel like making the trip to Kargos’s smithy. He

could drop by the smithy at night on his way back from ‘Darker than Black’ and fuse his sword then.

He had to go there to pick up Artemio anyway. Sungjin stood up from his seat to head to bed. Soldamyr who was next to him asked “Are you going back upstairs, Master?”

Sungjin replied

“Yeah. I am too tired today. I’ll be retiring early today. Please research on the ring until tomorrow.”

“Understood, Master.”

Sungjin who returned to his room didn’t take a bath like he normally would and only took a quick shower before collapsing into the bed. He fell right to sleep.

Four ten in the morning, Sungjin’s eyes opened themselves. He had gotten used to this sleep schedule and waking up early every morning.

Sungjin quickly washed his face before putting on day clothes and leaving the room. He saw Dalupin walking up the stairs. He must have come to wake Sungjin up.

When he saw Sungjin, he quietly moved out of the way. Sungjin passed him and reached the 1st floor. Soldamyr was inside his lamp. He didn’t require sleep, but it must have been easier for him to ‘research’ while inside the lamp.

Outside the Inn were the animals he had spiritual link with; Rajenta, Cain, and Shadowrun. Shadowrun looked like he did not need sleep at all. After Shadowrun saw Sungjin wearing Besgoro, ‘Brrr’

He let out a sound once. Cain noticed his master leaving, and stood up as well but “Stay Cain”

Cain was stopped by Sungjin’s gesture and command and returned to sleep. The youngest of the bunch, Rajenta, was the

only one to sleep soundly in his straw nest. As Cain had once done so, he was growing rapidly day by day. Estimating his rate of growth, Rajenta would likely grow to be double the size of Cain.

‘Well, I did hear that Royal Griffins... grow to the size of a small dragon.’

Sungjin left them behind and headed towards ‘Darker than Black’ alone.

He took the napkin out of his pocket on the way. And on the napkin was the following message.

‘He who searches for answers finds questions, and he who searches for questions finds answers.’

Sungjin read the completed text and thought of the ‘Darker than Black’ Merchant. The man had definitely uttered this from time to time. Sungjin stared at the pen. There was more to the message.

‘4:30 in the morning, head to the 3rd district, last building on the right, underground.’

It was written by ‘Mu – Pen of Reply’, the message which Ariana was unwilling to speak out loud due to her mother telling her ‘not to get involved with that man’.

The individual that even the mighty dragons were afraid to cross was none other than the merchant of Darker than Black. Sungjin said while holding onto the napkin “Just what is he? God? Demon? Or...?”

If anyone saw Sungjin right now, he would appear to be talking to himself, but there was indeed someone that was listening. It was Besgoro.

‘Who the fuck cares. Why are you wearing me every time you go there, but take me off when you’re meeting with pretty ladies?’

“That’s because I can see better in the dark wearing you. The shop ‘Darker than Black’ is just as advertised. Furthermore... about

when I'm talking to ladies... You know exactly why, right?"

Besgoro did not reply. He seemed upset.

'Is this how a 50 year old man should act?'

Sungjin thought as he entered into the Darker than Black. The merchant was sitting in the same spot as usual.

Thinking about it, the merchant seemed more like a piece of furniture like tables or chairs rather than a person. Once Sungjin arrived, he greeted Sungjin.

"Ah, you're still alive, Master Hunter K."

His words expressed surprise, but his tone of voice said otherwise. Sungjin asked him "You already knew though, that I'd be back."

"Well, I could predict to some extent that you would."

But once again his words were mismatched to his tone. Sungjin took the seat directly in front of him.

"This raid was really difficult. The boss Red Dragon, as well as [her mother](#)"

Apparently Khal Gal is a girl

"Ahh, so you met her? Ariane?"

Sungjin stared straight at him and asked

"You know her?"

"I have heard of her, although I've never directly met her."

He looked slightly up as if thinking about something and said "It's just that I've met her mother before. When she was a tiny hatchling."

Sungjin was surprised and asked

"When Ariane was a hatchling?"

If what he said was true, it would be an incredibly long time ago.

But the man shook his head.

“No, no. I’ve met HER mother when she was an infant.”

Sungjin couldn’t believe it. If true, it meant that his age was more than a few thousand to tens of thousands of years old. Sungjin stared at him, and the man said “What is it? Are you curious about my age?”

Sungjin said bluntly

“It’s not like you’re going to tell me even if I ask you anyway.”

“Well, that’s not entirely true. Also... something like age is completely unimportant, isn’t it?”

Sungjin said to him

“It is important to a human being. We also value acting our age. But not you. Since you aren’t human.”

He grinned at Sungjin’s accusation.

“How can you be so sure?”

“Then are you human? You can’t be. There is no way.”

“Well feel free to think what you want.”

Sungjin took the napkin out of his pocket and handed it over.

“Here.”

The merchant narrowed his eyes and said

“What about this?”

“Ariane gave me this. Telling me that it would help me alter my fate. But I already knew where to find you from before I died in my previous life. And so I was able to meet you before ever meeting Ariane.”

“So?”

“Despite that, you were unsurprised to see me. In other words... you already knew that I am a regressor, right?”

The merchant placed the napkin on the table and said “Yeah, there’s very few things I do not know.”

Sungjin asked

“Then what are you? And just what is this raid for?”

The man answered

“In this dimension, I just sell few knick knacks and work as a merchant, but in other dimensions, I am an information broker. I give answers to questions, but I demand payment for the value of the information.”

“And? You want me to pay?”

“Of course.”

“How much?”

“The first question, ‘What are you?’ You might not recall, but you already asked me that. And the price of that information, as I already said before, is 10,000 white coins.”

Sungjin frowned. With the way the Raid works, it was physically impossible to gather 10,000 White Coins.

“Second question, what are Raids for? The Operator already gave you that answer in the past. To prove the strength of humanity. Prove the worth of your species, and everyone goes free. Or the race is eradicated. It’s that kind of game.”

Sungjin glared at him. It didn’t seem like he intended to give any straight answers.

“What about this question? Is there such a thing as ‘the last raid’?”

“Hmm about that... I can tell you for 100 Black Coins.”

Just 100 Black Coins. It was a very small amount. Sungjin immediately said “Complete transaction.”

As soon as Sungjin finished uttering his words, the man

immediately gave an answer.

“There is a last one. In terms of the chapters... remember the raid you died on?”

“Yes.”

“It’s not far from there. The last one.”

Sungjin was shocked.

“Really?”

“I’m not called information broker for no reason. I give guaranteed answers to any paid question.”

‘We weren’t far from the end at ‘that chapter’... that means from now on...’

Sungjin fell into deep thought. Soon, the man asked “Well, did you come only to ask questions today?”

“No, that’s not it.”

Sungjin shook his head.

“Please recharge these.”

Sungjin placed the five marbles on the table. The Merchant picked them up briefly before returning them to the table. The Marbles regained their luminosity.

“Recharge complete.”

Sungjin put those marbles away into his vest.

“And... I was going to buy Elixirs today... before that... is there any item that can gather the Chosen Ones into one spot? Trying to meet them all one by one is proving to be inconvenient.”

“Ahh, for that...”

He reached into the darkness and pulled out a short staff. The Staff was similar to the ‘[Helix Ring](#)’ in that it was in a double helix shape. A round gem was embedded on the tip, and upon closer

inspection, Sungjin could see that the staff was decorated to look like two dragons competing for a Dragon Ball.

Originally I had translated the ring as Ring of Helrick. It looked like it was a nordic/european name, and it wouldn't have been a bad guess per se. But as I was translating another 'Helrick' Item, I realized 'huh. both items are described to be twisted around.' Then I realized that the shape is basically a double helix, and the phonetics of helrick is the same as helix in Korean.

“Helix Staff – Staff of the Warlord. The price is 30,000 Black Coins. Once a day, you can call upon every Chosen One into one spot. In addition, you can check what's happening to the chosen ones and teleport there yourself.”

It was good. Furthermore, it allowed him to choose to enter a dimension without having to wait for a Chosen to request a summon first. Sungjin liked it a lot. But the price was hefty and made him hesitate. 30,000 Black Coins. It was expensive even for Sungjin who was relatively rich. Sungjin deliberated for a moment.

‘Well... Do I need this now?’

Sungjin quickly considered his options. He had roughly 54,000 coins in total. He owed Kargos 20,000 Coins. And if he takes the cost of combination for the Blood Vengeance, he could run short if he paid 30,000 Coins here. Sungjin made a decision and said “I'll... buy it tomorrow. Elixir as well.”

“Really? Do what you like.”

“Before that...”

Sungjin took out the white coins from his cube. There were four in total. Sungjin said while holding them up.

“Is there any item I can buy for four White Coins?”

But the merchant replied

“There is nothing you can buy other than four Holy Water with those.”

“... How much do I need to gather before I can buy something else?”

“Ten. If you can gather it, then you can purchase a different item.”

“Really? Then... give me four Holy Water for now.”

Sungjin handed over the white coins. He decided to have enough holy water to increase the number of Chosen Ones to nine. Afterwards, he could save up to buy something else.

The Merchant handed over four bottles to Sungjin. Sungjin received the bottles and stood up. He did not want to spend not a single more second in this place than he had to.

The Darker Than Black merchant told Sungjin

“Then see you tomorrow.”

Once out of the shop, Sungjin headed towards the Kargos's Smithy. While other shops were closed, the smithy alone gave off a brilliant light.

Sungjin took out Blood Vengeances out of his cube as he made his way to the smithy. One, two, three Blood Vengeances...

Sungjin even removed the Blood Vengeance hanging from his waist and carried them in his embrace as he made his way to the smithy.

Chapter 116 – Black Market Tenth Shopping (6)

Sungjin entered Kargos's Smithy with the four Blood Vengeances.

'Clang, Clang, Clang'

As always, Kargos was extremely focused on his craft. Sungjin watched him work. He was sweating profusely as he was hammering away at Artemio.

Sungjin stood still as to avoid distracting him. But meanwhile, Kargos said to him without stopping his hammer.

"You came?"

Sungjin was slightly surprised but managed to answer

"Yes."

"Please wait a bit longer. It's almost done."

Sungjin stood in place as asked. But then Kargos said to him

"What's this? Identical swords... four of them? Looking to fuse them?"

Kargos didn't turn around even once. He must have seen Sungjin through the reflection on Artemio's blade.

"Yes"

He continued to hammer away.

"Well if you're bored, you can do it yourself too."

"Myself?"

"Yes. Fusing them is easy. Put them in the box and shake a few times."

Sungjin leaned his four Blood Vengeances against the wall and

walked into the smithy; there he found the box Kargos used to fuse items in the past.

The box was a gray cube with gold corners. Sungjin brought the box to where he kept the Blood Vengeances. Kargos added

“The price of fusion for a Legendary item is 6000 Black Coins.”

“Complete Transaction.”

Sungjin’s cube floated towards Kargos’s cube and came back after briefly making contact. Sungjin opened the top of the box. It was a peculiar feeling; the inside looked much more spacious than the exterior size.

‘What is this?’

Sungjin checked the inside of the box. Meanwhile, Kargos’s hammer never missed a beat.

‘Well... as long as the fuse works that’s all that matters.’

Sungjin held himself as he inserted the Blood Vengeance one by one. The Blood Vengeance was originally longer than each of the sides of the gray cube, but there was plenty of space inside even after all four swords had been placed within.

‘As I thought... some sort of magical box.’

Sungjin put the lid on the box and shook it twice. But the box made no noise. It wasn’t as if it gave an announcement like the Operator would have.

‘Did it work?’

Sungjin opened the box again. But inside was only a single sword remaining. Sungjin picked up the sword and immediately pulled it out of the sheath. The red glint in the sword’s blade seemed to be denser than before.

‘It worked.’

Sungjin held the reddened Blood Vengeance up to inspect it, and

the Operator displayed the status window for the item.

Blood Vengeance – Bloodthirsty Devourer

Unique Legendary Katana – Strength SSS Dexterity S

Active Skill

Baptism of Blood (V) – Consumes 10,000 HP per second from the user to increase attack power.

Passive Skill

Vengeful Spite (I) – When HP hits 1, become invulnerable for 1 second.

Final Strike (V) – When HP hits 1, the next hit against enemy deals 5 times as much damage.

He who wishes to confront great evil must become a sword.

A Sword sharper and stronger than any other.

Sungjin slowly read through the stats. It was the sword he had used in his previous life, so he knew the stats through and through, but because it had been a while since he last used it, he needed to read through it again.

‘Strength is triple S. Dexterity’s S is okay... Baptism of Blood takes 10,000 HP per second. I could only use it for few seconds in the past... but I should be able to sustain it much longer now. Vengeful Spite and Final Strike remains unchanged from before.’

Sungjin carried the upgraded Blood Vengeance out of the Smithy and swung it few times to test it.

‘This is it... this feeling...’

Regaining the sword he had used in his previous life made it feel like he had returned to the past. Sungjin put the Blood Vengeance back into the Sheath and returned to where Kargos was working. Few minutes later, Kargos put down his hammer and wiped away his sweat. He said to Sungjin

“It’s done.”

He handed the brilliantly sparkling Artemio along with the scabbard to Sungjin. Sungjin accepted the sword and raised it above his head.

Artemio – Magic Slayer

Unique Legendary Scimitar – Strength SS Dexterity S

Passive Skill

Spell Eater (III) – Reduces damage taken from spells by 30%

Mana Burn (I) – Each strike with the sword reduces 10% of remaining mana of the opponent, and deals damage equal to mana lost.

Active Skill

Absorb Magic (VII) – Absorbs offensive type magic spells used against the caster under 7th class. Cooldown 10 minutes.

Expel Magic (VII) – Fires absorbed spell. 3 Uses available. Cooldown 10 Minutes

The Sword of Artemio who abhorred magic, Ironically

He came to be unable to live without the support of magic.

‘Hmm..’

It was the first time he had ever seen Artemio’s upgraded form. Sungjin checked the specs carefully. The first thing was that Strength and Dex rating had gone up by one tier each.

Although it had one less tier in Strength compared to Blood Vengeance and it did not have Mind power damage boost like Moon Specter, so it lacked overall damage. But it had amazing passive and active skills.

Sungjin especially paid attention to the latter half of the information screen. Spell Eater blocked additional 10% of the

incoming damage. This was great because no matter how fast Sungjin was, he could not always dodge area of effect spells.

The Mana Burn effect was also excellent. It was a skill befitting the name of 'Magic Slayer', a passive that's likely to prove to be a bane of any magician. Against mages, it might even have higher damage than Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance.

Finally, the active skill had changed. Magic reflect disappeared, and it split into Absorb Magic and Expel Magic.

'This means I can control the timing of when I want to fire it back. And I can do it up to three times? This is too good!'

There was no sword quite as good against mages as this one. Sungjin expressed his gratitude to Kargos.

"Thank you Kargos. I am much stronger thanks to you."

"This is my job you know... make sure you pay, and you can go."

"Ah, right."

Sungjin called for his cube.

"By the way... that Dragon Heart... is it...?"

"Yes. It's still being melted down. I checked it this morning, and I can begin to work on it soon."

"I see, I'll pay for that now as well before I leave."

"Hmm? Are you sure?"

"Yes, since spending money here is essential anyway."

"Well, it's good for me, so."

Sungjin ordered his cube to pay 20,000 Coins and complete the transaction.

"Then I'll see you again tomorrow morning."

"Yeah let's do that."

Sungjin bowed deeply before returning to Ninety Nine Nights

with the three Legendary swords hanging from his side. He passed Dalupin who was awake the whole night and returned to his bedroom. If it was any other time, he would have thought

‘Sleep now or prepare for raids?’

But Sungjin prepared to sleep without worrying about it today. He had plenty of time before the lunch date with Serin.

Before he went to sleep, he took a glance at the swords he kept next to the bed. Moon Specter, Artemio, and Blood Vengeance. The sword that caught his eye this time was the enhanced Blood Vengeance.

He had swung this sword until the moment he died in the previous life. Sungjin fell asleep while still staring at the sword. Perhaps because of it, Sungjin had a dream that night. Of the events of the past.

“Everyone ready?”

A massive hammer and a similarly large Shield was held by a mountain of a man, who addressed the others. His name was Hildebrandt.

With a height of over 2 meters tall, he carried a weapon, a full plate armor, and a shield, all of which weighed a hefty sum. He was the team’s dependable main tank.

He was originally a professional bodybuilder representing the country of Germany, so he had incredible strength, stamina, and athletic ability. Until the end games, he had maintained 1st place in contribution in every raid.

“I am always ready.”

Replied Ryushin, standing on one leg in a crane stance, holding his leg on one hand and a spear on the other. He was the pupil of a grandmaster of an ancient Chinese martial arts sect, and had unbelievable skill with the spear befitting his title of ‘God of

Spears’.

He had a strong ego and a competitive spirit, so he often had frictions with the other hunters, but most hunters backed off once they saw his ability.

“I am also ready.”

Araujo was a crossbowman from Brazil. His occupation was that of a Soldier; he said he had traveled through the Amazon rainforest and had real combat experience.

He learned how to wield a crossbow from his father as a child. Not only was he skilled with it, but he was also highly proficient with a dagger, and could fight melee as well as ranged.

“Umkhuba ready”

Umkhuba was an African aborigine. He used a much shorter spear than Ryushin and had an extremely quick and agile body, along with natural instincts he was born with. He was famous for being able to launch overambitious attacks and come out without a scratch.

“I have yet to finish praying to God. Please give me a moment.”

Mustafa was a Mage. His area of specialization was green and white. He had started with three to four times as much magic power than anyone else, so he knew he was destined to become a Magician from the start.

He had tried to utilize magic from the very start. So his understanding and proficiency of the spells were very high.

“Then I’ll also take this opportunity to pray.”

Nada was team’s one and only woman. She was proficient with the dagger and was a master of black magic. She had an amazing figure, but no one dared to provoke her.

“Praying... in this situation?”

The speaker wielded an axe and buckler. No one knew much

about Illich besides the fact that he was a Russian. He had defined muscles on par with Hildebrandt, with a withdrawn personality. But he sometimes discussed with Ryushin on combat skill, and with Araujo on strategy. The consensus of those who have spoken to him was that he was once a soldier and a high-ranking commissioned officer at that.

“Hmm... I am ready as well.”

Shunsuke was an archer. The Japanese man was quiet and collected, but whenever he held the bow, he seemed to transform, shooting arrows like some battle machine. He was hard to understand, but his skill was dependable.

“I am ready.”

Sungjin said raising his hands. His position was that of the main forward damage dealer. His job was to swing his Bloodthirsty sword, ‘Blood Vengeance’, without rest. Sungjin took a look at his teammates.

With the exception of Mustafa who was bowing and praying to some far off location and Nada who was making cross signs, everyone else looked ready. Sungjin clapped his hands and said

“That means we should be good to go as soon as those two finishes.”

But someone grasped his shoulder and said

“What? But I’m not ready yet, Sungjin.”

Sungjin turned around. The man who was fixing his boots while holding onto Sungjin’s shoulder was he; the best magician in the team, Edward.

Chapter 117 – Sungjin’s Nightmare

Demon King’s Castle Raid

Objective – hunt the Demon King ‘Chadnezzar’

Time Limit 5 hours

The hunters reached the gates in previously arranged formation. Sungjin embraced Blood Vengeance as he took a look around.

Hildebrandt and Illich were having a discussion in the front.

“The information sheet mentioned this, but the thing we should watch out for....”

“Yes... If a mage appears, I will mark it. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

Ryushin and Umkhuba were stretching on the 3rd row.

“Hou Hou”

Umkhuba was making strange noises as he hopped lightly in place. Ryushin stretched his neck side to side, then tapped on Umkhuba’s six pack as he said “Watch me, Umkhuba; I’ll get a lot more contribution than you this time.”

Umkhuba opened his mouth wide in a grin

“Haha, we shall see about that.”

“What? You wanna mess with me?”

“Operator will judge fairly.”

“Fine... Let us see who’s better once and for all.”

Fourth row was Araujo and Edward’s spot. Araujo who was in his 40s was always complaining to Ed who was in his 20s.

“Hey Edward, please listen to me this time. You’re good and all but you’re always doing your own thing.”

“I am the strongest when I do what I want.”

“That’s what I mean, that’s the problem.”

The last row was Shunsuke and Mustafa’s spot. Both men were silent. Shunsuke was checking his crossbow rails, and Mustafa was reading some sort of book. Sungjin looked over them as he thought ‘This... is humanity’s final expedition...’

But a set of large boobs suddenly came into view.

“Sungjin, looking forward to working with you again.”

Sungjin was startled and took a step back. The person sharing his row was Nada, the dual wielder who wielded both the dagger and staff.

“I’ll be in your care, Nada.”

Sungjin had become friendly with Nada after running into each other often in raids. She was a little intimidating to approach at first due to her merciless use of daggers and zombies in combat, but she was a kind and warm woman at heart.

“I hope this Raid is the last one. Demon Kings are usually the final bosses in stories or games, right?”

“Well, I guess...”

“I’ll go take a trip to Korea once I’m done, Sungjin. I’m curious how you lived your life in the real world.”

“I...well...”

Sungjin couldn’t give her a straight answer. He was orphaned since infancy and had lived the most difficult of childhood and was barely scraping together a living. She continued to ask “What do you want to do when you go back?”

“Hmm... Actually... There isn’t anything that I want to do in particular...”

That was when Edward jumped into the conversation.

“You’ll probably find tons of things you want to do if you make it

back”

Sungjin and Nada turned to look at him. He was always full of energy and often invited himself into other people’s conversations.

“What do you mean?”

“What do you mean what do I mean? It should be obvious, right? Once the raids are over, we will become rich. Unimaginably so.”

When Sungjin tilted his head, he explained

“What do you think will happen once the raids are over?”

Nada gave an ordinary answer.

“Hmm... I’ll meet my family and speak to them again.”

But Sungjin couldn’t say anything. He had no family. Edward said “Yes, you’ll go visit your family... and then?”

“Hmm... I told Sungjin that I’ll visit Korea as well.”

“You can go to Korea... but you should also go see the whole world.”

“The whole world?”

Edward nodded as if it was something obvious.

“Of course we have to go on a world trip. Even if we don’t intend to, we’ll probably have to. As the final 10 members who saved the entire human race.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Edward replied with his arms spread apart.

“It’s obvious, right? We’ll become heroes of humanity once the raids are over.”

Nada and Sungjin said at the same time

“He-ro?”

Ed once again nodded as if this was common sense.

“Of course, hero.”

“How?”

“It is because we are the final ten. We would have saved every country, as the final ten heroes who brought salvation to mankind. Don’t you think we’ll get a hero’s welcome?”

Sungjin narrowed his eyes.

“And exactly who will know this?”

“Well.. wouldn’t Operator let everyone know? Like, announce the names of the final 10 or something.”

Nada also shook her head.

“I don’t know...”

Edward remained optimistic.

“Well, if not we can just go around saying that we were. If all of us can tell the exactly the same story, they can’t help but believe us. And people that died along the way can provide witness testimony. If we put down our memories and experiences into memoirs and autobiographies, I bet they’ll sell like crazy. It’ll probably become worldwide best sellers. And if that happens, wouldn’t we be fabulously rich?”

“Will we?”

“Of course we will. And we aren’t just any heroes; we will be the saviors of the world! It wouldn’t be strange if we become superstars with companies begging us to appear in their commercials. It might be to a point where we no longer need money in our lives.”

“Hmm... is that so? I’ve never really thought of it too much.”

“Well, me neither...”

“What? I bet other people think the same way I do. Isn’t that right Hildebrandt?”

The Operator gave an announcement at that point.

[Raid will begin in 1 minute.]

Hildebrandt said from the front

“World famous, fabulously rich, heroes of humanities, all good. But let’s discuss this after this raid.”

Illich added

“Go back to your spot Edward. It’s about to start.”

Edward then shut his mouth and returned to his spot. There was only one more minute left. It was for just a moment, but Sungjin had a pleasant daydream.

‘I never thought of it... it could be true...’

Becoming famous worldwide and live as a VIP. If so, he would finally be free from money problems that plagued him his whole life. Just thinking about it made him happy. Meanwhile [10... 3, 2, 1, 0]

[Raid has begun.]

The gates of the Demon King’s castle opened along with the Operator’s announcements.

The skeleton mage recited a spell using the staff he held out in front of him.

“Eternal...”

Everyone knew the spells by the incantations at this point. All the hunters immediately split up.

“Flames of hell. Inferno”

The flames came flying towards the hunters, but thanks to splitting up ahead of time, no one was hurt by the spell. The hunters quickly reformed formation and continued to attack. But “Edward! Mustafa!”

Illich bellowed loudly, but it was too late

“Eternal flames of hell, Inferno”

“Eternal flames of hell, Inferno”

Staffs of two additional skeleton mages launched flames from their staves.

“Anti-Magic Shield”

Edward and Mustafa each cast their Anti-Magic Shield to protect the hunters, but those who didn't manage to run into the protected areas were burnt by the fires.

“Ahh!”

Sungjin who happened to be within the area of the shield ran out brandishing his sword.

“Baptism of Blood”

Blood Vengeance began to glow bright red as he attacked one of the Skeletal mages. It was a very risky attack.

If another mage were to hit Sungjin with a spell few seconds after the Baptism of blood was used, it could mean instant death. But Sungjin believed in his teammates.

Luckily, while he was confronting the skeletal mage, the hunters who weren't hit by the spell had already launched their attacks and kept the other two busy.

“Whew...”

Once the battle was over, the hunters checked each other's conditions.

“Are you okay?”

Luckily no one had died. But Illich began to bellow.

“Damn it!”

Everyone turned to face him.

“I’ve told you to cast protection on the tanks in case of danger!”

His voice was meant for Edward and Mustafa. Hildebrandt was defending them.

“I got mine... it appeared around me.”

Mustafa shrugged and answered

“Well... It looked like it might be bad if Sungjin and Shunsuke were to be hit, so I protected them instead.”

Illich frowned deeply as he said

“Damn it, if you were going to make your own decisions on the fly why are we even planning ahead of time? Did your God tell you to do that too?”

“Are you in contempt of God?”

Complaints began from another side as well.

“Why didn’t you use it for me? If you can protect me, I could have finished it in a blink of an eye. You all know I am the best. Focus me. Haa... I couldn’t swing my spear because I was too busy dodging fire...”

It was Ryushin.

“Stop uttering nonsense. We have to respond to what is happening. How can you be so self-centered?”

Araujo scolded him. Shunsuke also joined in.

“He’s right. You have to think of the team.”

Ryushin then got mad at Shunsuke and said,

“Don’t give me that crap. Mind your own business.”

Sungjin grasped his forehead. Several raids were ruined because of fights like these. And even until the end, everyone was still bickering among themselves. Sungjin shook his head.

Then he noticed that Edward, who was always full of energy had

an incredibly foul expression. It was then that Sungjin felt a premonition of something going wrong.

The raid continued after the argument. After four hours passed out of the five hour time limit, the group finally reached the gates to the Raid boss Demon King ‘Chadnezzar’.

Nobody had spoken, but as Nada had said

‘Demon Kings are usually the final bosses, right?’

Similar thoughts ran through their heads, so they were more tense than usual. Even Sungjin, who didn’t think much of the situation, felt elevated expectations.

‘If we kill him... we might really have done it...’

The Demon King had a monstrous appearance suitable for his name. His skin was red with black runes tattooed all over his body. He had horns growing out of his head and a third eye on his forehead. He had six arms, and the hands held a sword, hammer, staff, spear, and two shields.

His entire body was shrouded by an unidentifiable black material, and whenever he moved, the material moved with him.

“Haa... you dare intrude upon my castle... Do you not value your life?”

He unfurled his robe as he stood up.

“Come, my subjects, kill these intruders!”

Three portals appeared at his command, and monsters poured out of them.

“Everybody to their positions”

Sungjin who was in charge of the portal in the back ran towards it as promised. The plan was for him to kill enemies for a while, and then join the team up front when the signal was given for the final confrontation against the Demon King.

But the battle was far more difficult than they had expected. It was a given that seven hunters facing off against the Demon King would have trouble, but Nada and Ryushin weren't able to properly deal with the portals they were assigned to and were being pushed back.

“Hey! Heal!”

“Please help me here”

Sungjin also gave it his best to hold them back, but the monsters poured out of the portal endlessly. So eventually he was being overrun. As prearranged, Sungjin requested help from Edward “Edward, support fire here!”

He soon heard Edward chant an incantation.

“Divine spear of destruction, Spear of God”

But strangely the spell did not come flying his way.

“Kaaa!”

“Ahhh!”

Instead, he heard cries of agony coming from the hunters' side. Sungjin looked back in shock, and then he was surprised a second time. Instead of helping Sungjin, Edward had fired the spell onto the hunters. Sungjin thought for a moment ‘What’s going on? Mind control?’

But that wasn't it. Edward's body which began to glow red was a definitive proof.

‘Troll?’

Sungjin couldn't believe his eyes, but this was without a doubt the proof of a troll. The hunters' formation which was barely holding on against the Demon King quickly crumbled due to Edward's surprise attack.

The six other hunters who were facing the Demon King were first.

“Infighting in my presence? What a joke. Die.”

While the formation was broken, the hunters were wiped out in a single strike. Sungjin thought ‘Why?’

“Ahh!”

Meanwhile, Ryushin was slain. Nada also took few steps back, and Sungjin watched as holes appeared on her body. Sungjin shouted at Ed.

“Why!”

Ed did not say anything. He smiled faintly, and shortly after, his entire body disappeared from the Demon King’s attack. The monsters now converged on Sungjin.

“Kiii!”

Blood Vengeance cried. It meant that his HP had reached 1. The 1 second of invulnerability had begun. And another second later, Sungjin died, as the final human to fall.

Chapter 118 – Black Market Tenth Shopping

(7)

“Ah...!”

Sungjin opened his eyes. A familiar ceiling entered his vision and he sat up on the bed. Feeling his forehead, he discovered that he was drenched in sweat.

‘Cold sweat?’

Sungjin let out a long sigh.

“Haa...”

He relived the moment he had died in his dream. He must be the only one in the world capable of doing so since a dead man cannot dream.

Sungjin who just dreamt of his old teammates from his previous life thought about them for a moment as he laid back in bed. About what he should do if he were to meet them again, and who he will choose to be his teammates once more.

In the first row was Hildebrandt. He had a cheerful demeanor. Even in moments of peril, he wouldn't forget to crack a joke (they were often not funny). And he had said that his daughter was in purgatory.

He was a man dedicated to ending the raid from start to the end.

‘He passes...’

Second was Illich. He was a bit more difficult. He definitely had great skill, but he was very easy to anger and lacked flexibility. Whenever anyone deviated even slightly from the agreed strategy, he would berate them harshly.

‘He is... rejected. He certainly had leadership potential... but this time I am the leader.’

The second row had him and Nada with whom he had already reunited. Once again, they will fight alongside each other in the 2nd row.

Third row's first member was Ryushin. Like other members, the probability of him surviving this far is very high. Just a few chapters ago, someone had purchased a legendary spear from the auction who Sungjin believed to be him. But he wasn't someone Sungjin wanted in the final ten members.

'He was far too egoistic and prideful. Even though I had to put up with it in the past... I am much stronger than he is now. Rather than me putting up with him, he wouldn't be able to stand having me around. Rejected.'

Next was Umkhuba. He certainly had unbelievable physical prowess. But he was far removed from the civilized code of ethics and often had issues with communication. He would certainly be able to pull his own weight, but he would often do something bizarre that greatly shocked the rest of the team.

'I don't think... Umkhuba passes...'

Next was Araujo. He had a high understanding of tactics and strategy, but he was also on the nagging side.

'Hmm... but at least he wouldn't try to provoke a fight like Illich... does he pass? No no. He thinks too highly of himself and has too many complaints. He will... most definitely try to lecture and contradict me too.'

Next was Edward. There was only one choice.

'Rejected... no, even if I have to put up with becoming a troll for one round, I need to eliminate him.'

Next was Shunsuke. Shunsuke had been in Sungjin's team twice in the raids towards the end, but he always remained silent, and Sungjin never had an opportunity to hold a conversation with him.

'I still don't know anything about that guy... so, for now, it's a

defer decision... or does that mean I should just reject him at this point?’

Last was the healer Mustafa. He came from a different cultural background so he was occasionally difficult to understand, but he was deeply motivated to end the raids to save his family. And the number of skilled healers were low to begin with.

‘He passes.’

Now that he thought of it, aside from Nada and himself, only two out of the eight remaining hunters had passed his judgement. Hildebrandt and Mustafa. Sungjin thought of them for a moment.

Although they were from a very different background, they were also quite similar in some ways. Sungjin took a moment to think of what that was. And soon, he came up with the answer.

‘...family... is it’

Others had families as well, but the two men were the only ones who had carried their family photos in their wallets when they were first dragged into the raids.

‘Look, look Sungjin. They are my daughters. They all resemble their mother, aren’t they such beauties?’

‘In our country, we all lived together. Look look, this is my wife, my son, daughter, brother, brother’s wife...’

The two men were deeply motivated by the desire to rescue their families and felt a strong sense of responsibility towards putting the raids to an end. Sungjin grinned while thinking of them.

‘Well, it isn’t like all fathers are like them though.’

Sungjin was an abandoned orphan. Sungjin stood up from his bed. But when he absentmindedly looked towards the window, he saw lights leaking into the room through the gaps in the blinds.

Sungjin walked over to the windows and opened the blinds. The sun was already high up in the sky. He recalled that he had a lunch

appointment with Serin.

“Operator, what time is it?”

[11 o clock, 42 minutes, 32 seconds.]

There wasn't much time before his appointment with Serin. Sungjin began to prepare himself hastily.

A demi-human with the head of a lion and body of a human came to ask “How would you like your steak prepared?”

Sungjin stiffened up. He was unfamiliar with these kind of places. Serin answered first.

“Um... I'd like it done medium rare.”

Sungjin quickly ordered the same

“Ah, me too.”

The place Sungjin was teleported to was a fancy restaurant with a classical orchestra being played in the background. The restaurant was near the auction house, on the top floor of the only five-story building in the Black Market.

‘I knew this place existed but...’

He never thought he would come here until today when Serin had him teleport here. Sungjin was inexpertly cutting his steak with the knife and fork as he exchanged words with her. It was their second meeting, but he had even less to talk about than last time.

If they were in the middle of Seoul, they might have been able to share a few words. But in the middle of the raids where people were forced to kill or be killed, the only topic they could speak about was of the raids.

“If you see anyone good during the raid, recommend them to me.”

“Recommend?”

Sungjin nodded.

“Yes, to become our comrade.”

“What kind...”

“There are a few criterion, but first and foremost is being a good human being and having a strong sense of teamwork. As you can tell... this raid cannot be beaten alone.”

“I understand.”

Serin nodded quickly at his words. She had seen many trolls. She would understand better than anyone else.

“And... it would be best if they were strong too, right?”

“Yes of course... although Oppa is probably the strongest.”

Hearing the word ‘Oppa’ was still strange.

“Well, yeah. And... no, that’s all. Those two things. Kind and strong.”

“Well... that... I think will be hard.”

“What is?”

“Finding someone simultaneously strong and kind. This raid rewards selfish behavior... which is why trolls exist.”

She had thought the same way he did.

“I think so too. But it isn’t like there are none. In fact, it is because they are rare that they have value in finding.”

“...I see. I understand Oppa. I’ll look for them.”

“Thanks. I’ll depend on you.”

“Comrades, you say?”

3 pm. Sungjin was eating waffle with Franz at a waffle house. His hands were getting sticky from the sauce and so eating was much less graceful than earlier, but Sungjin preferred this.

“Yes, Comrades. People we want to add as a Chosen One like yourself.”

“Hee... how exciting. Getting more Chosen Ones.”

“There are two others besides you.”

“Ah... I saw one of them. The Asian beauty from before.”

“Yeah well... there is a Western Beauty as well.”

“Really?”

“Yes. She doesn’t look like a stereotypical Caucasian... but she’s from Europe like you.”

“Ooh, I see... But is it okay Mr Kei?”

“What is?”

“Picking comrades by their looks.”

“Eh, that isn’t it... it just so happened...”

“Haha it was a joke, a joke. And I’m a man after all. I like having beautiful women on our side.”

“... Anyway, if you see any dependable and trustworthy individuals, please let me know.”

“I got it, Kei.”

“Didn’t you see last time, when you called me for help... the female archer who was standing by my side?”

“Hmm... I didn’t see.”

Nada said as she put a fork wrapped in pasta in her mouth. 7 PM. Sungjin was having his third meeting of the day with Nada.

‘Sungjin, Looking forward to working with you again.’

It was much different than when he saw her in his dream. Serin was the same; women seemed to be creatures who drastically change their behavior based on levels of friendship.

“The situation was quite dire; I must have not noticed it, Kei.”

“Well, that makes sense I guess, since the Dragon’s breath was being fired towards you as we spoke.”

“Anyway, so there’s a long haired Asian woman and another guy?”

“Yes”

“So, how many empty spots are remaining?”

“Taking ten man raid as the standard, six spots.”

“Six...”

She put down her wine to gaze out the window. The night scene of the Black Market was visible through the window. After staring at the light outside, she said to him “Strong but trustworthy comrades, does six more even exist?”

She spoke as if she had also experienced ‘The last Raid’.

‘So Nada feels this way as well...’

Sungjin said to her

“Then... focus on trustworthiness. Since if they reached this far, they have already proved that they are skillful. And about being strong... Being given the Chosen One title can probably make up the difference.”

“Probably. And... this is just a guess, but everyone given the Chosen One title will probably survive to the end. The Chosen One passive is such a gigantic stat buff in of itself. And we can even ask for help when in danger...”

“But calling me all the time is a problem as well.”

She grinned at his comment and said

“I know, I know.”

“Anyway, I’ll leave it to you. If there is anyone you’d recommend as a comrade, let me know.”

“What will you do after you are called?”

“I will hmm... need to interview them.”

Nada opened her eyes wide as she said

“I~ntervie~w?”

“Yes, interview. I need to meet them face to face and exchange a few words, see their approximate strength, and check to see if they have the right qualities to become our comrade. It won’t be easy though.”

Nada smiled.

“Kei... you’re acting like some sort of CEO.”

Sungjin frowned slightly. But he couldn’t come up with any retort.

After separating with Nada, Sungjin returned to his bedroom. But only a few seconds later, ‘Knock knock’

Dalupin came knocking at the door.

“What is it, Dalupin?”

“Receipts have arrived from the Auction House today as well, Mr Hunter.”

Now that he thought of it, there was that possibility too. Sungjin quickly got up to open the door. Dalupin handed over the receipts as well as the information sheet for the next raid.

“Thank you Dalupin.”

Dalupin bowed deeply and left. Sungjin put down the information sheet as he checked the number of receipts.

‘One, two, three, four, five, six...?’

Six receipts. Every item up for auction had been sold.

‘I knew it... I priced the items perfectly.’

Sungjin stuffed the receipts into the cube. He then asked the Operator “Then... how many black coins do I have?”

[You have 46215 Coins.]

With this amount, he would be able to buy the ‘Staff of Helix’ and the elixir. Sungjin came down to the 1st floor as he thought so.

As promised, Soldamyr was waiting for him. Sungjin asked him “So, how is the research progressing?”

He had tasked Soldamyr with researching on ‘Aio – Ring of the Great Sage’ for the day. At his question, Soldamyr answered “Master, I was able to gain some insights.”

Chapter 119 – Black Market Tenth Shopping (8)

“Insights... tell me in detail.”

“The Ring of the Great Sage you wear is undeniably powerful. The ability to use all existing blue magic as well as multiplying the Magic Power by 5... You could buy a country if you were to sell the ring.”

Sungjin lifted up his hands to take a look at the ring inside which a strange blue material floated around within.

‘But it looks like any old cheap toy ring you could buy for a dollar at a street vendor... and this thing is worth as much as a country?’

“But as you can probably tell, you can only make use of the amplified Magic Power if you have sufficient mana to handle it.”

“Hmm...”

“There is a great deal of Blue Magic that would become very useful with higher mana pool. Even if it isn’t a spell at the pinnacle like the 9th class spells, there’s still Ice Shield, Teleport, Ice Lance, Blizzard Storm and other powerful spells that exist in every class. But the only spell you can use right now is...”

“Yeah, the 2nd class or below, Frost Bite; Just one.”

“Yes, that is correct. I believe it was said that you can use the effects of the Ring of the Great Sage for up to 30 seconds upon activation... but that’s not all that important. There is too little mana to matter...”

“Mmm...”

He was not wrong.

“Then... I need to raise Mind Power from this point on, right? And a lot of it?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“And avoid raising Magic Power for now?”

“That is also correct. While it is nice to have a high amount of Magic Power, you can’t use any of it as it is right now. And if possible, using higher class magic will be more useful. The common belief is that it is a much more effective use of mana to use one class 4 spell than two class 2 spells.”

“Hmm... really?”

“Yes.”

Sungjin pondered for a moment. In the past, Edward had most certainly said ‘One shot of Fireball is better than two rounds of firebolt.’

“But if you think of it that way, then the most efficient use of mana is to just use the 9th class magic.”

“Yes, that is the case. I have never used it, so I do not know for sure... but if you are able to turn back time... anything should become possible. Especially for Master who is skilled with the sword...”

“Mmm yeah... what do you think about my current level of Magic Power? How many seconds would I be able to go back in time with the 9th class spell? Assuming I have enough mana.”

“For the exact number... I cannot say. However, I will say this that Master is already an excellent mage. And with the help of the ring, Master can rise to the prominent ranks of a Great Wizard and leave a mark in history as a user of the 9th class magic.”

“Really? Mmm... Then I should first aim to raise my mana.”

“For that purpose, please look at this.”

Soldamyr placed a sheet of paper on top of the table. Sungjin took a look. On the paper was written ‘11119, 13725’

These were somehow a familiar set of values, but Sungjin

couldn't immediately recall where he had seen them. Sungjin asked Soldamyr "What is this?"

"This is Master's current Magic Power and Mind Power."

"Ahh, I see."

Last night, Soldamyr had asked

'Master, what is your current Magic and Mind power levels?'

So he answered with

'Operator, show Soldamyr my current stats.'

But he soon forgot about it. Soldamyr pointed towards the numbers on the page.

"Those are master's basic stats."

He then quickly wrote additional values.

'12787, 15784'

"These are in the case of 15% bonus, which is when you have any title equipped other than Master Hunter. And these are"

'14455, 17843'

"Your stats when you use the Master Hunter title. If you raise your Magic Power by 5 here, it becomes 72275. And if you multiply another 9 on top of that, it becomes the amount of mana required to activate the 9th class blue magic spell Time Reversal, which comes to 650475."

"What an absurd amount."

"Yes, it means you need roughly 50,000 more Mind power in order to use it just once."

"If I had known this would happen, I would have invested fewer points into magic power."

"No, not at all. If your magic power is too low... it could result in going back by a mere second or two after using all that mana to

cast the spell. That would also be very unhelpful. It is better this way. Just work hard towards slowly building up your mana and unlocking one class at a time.”

“Hmm... yeah. But it is still a little disappointing. I had thought I might be able to use the Time Reversal right away.”

“9th Class magic were often called Spells of the Divine Order. Typically only Dragons are able to cast them as they are the true masters of magic power. Without a Dragon’s Heart...”

Sungjin tilted his head when he heard that.

“Hmm?”

“Yes?”

“Just now... did you say Dragon’s Heart?”

“Yes, Dragon’s Heart.”

“That... I got one last raid.”

“Excuse me? Dragon’s Heart? The origin of mana?”

“Yeah”

Soldamyr’s mouth was agape.

“What?”

Now that he thought of it, Soldamyr was not around when Sungjin had picked up the Dragon’s Heart. Sungjin had called him out after meeting Ariane and not even once after returning to Ninety Nine Nights did he have a chance to see it, as Sungjin left it behind at the Black Market as soon as he arrived.

“That... where is it now?”

“I left it with the smithy, to make another weapon.”

“Huh... In that case... we’ll just have to believe in the skill of the blacksmith. I do not know what kind of blade would be made but... It would be great if the sword retained the true nature of the Dragon’s Heart.”

Sungjin asked him

“By True nature...”

“Supplying Mana. If the sword can do that, You might be able to use the Time Reversal as early as the next round.”

“Mmm, I see...”

Sungjin paused for a moment to look out the window as he thought ‘Well, we can’t help but believe in Kargos... He promised to make a spellblade... I’ll just take his word for it.’

But then he remembered his words.

“I treat all items that pass through my hand as my own children; I give it my best for my children. But just because I am their father it does not mean that I can predict how they will end up as adults.’

The die has already been cast. Now all he could do was pray that the roll was favorable.

Four Thirty in the morning, Sungjin headed towards Darker than Black again.

“I’ll buy that emperor staff or whatever you called it.”

“I guess the troll hunt is going well? Here you go.”

Sungjin received the item and held it above his head.

Staff of Helix – Sceptre of the Warlord

Heroic Staff – Strength B Dexterity C

Active Skill

Draft (I) – Summons all Chosen Ones. Chosen ones are able to reject the summon.

Cooldown 1 day.

Mandatory Draft (I) – Forcefully summons the Chosen Ones who rejected the Draft. Those who are summoned this way are unable to leave the Dimension for 10 minutes.

Cooldown 1 day.

Inspection (I) – Select a Chosen One and check the situation. May choose to teleport to the Chosen One being viewed.

Cooldown 5 minutes.

The child grinned jestfully as he said

‘In the world of kings, I will become the smallest, yet the largest king of the jungle’

But his eyes were filled with certainty.

Sungjin accepted it. It had all the functions he was promised. Summoning and observing. But then it also had a peculiar function he did not expect.

“Can refuse the summon... and then forcefully summon...”

Sungjin muttered to himself. The Darker than Black Merchant said “If there is a king... there is bound to be a disobedient subject. Perhaps even a rebel...”

“Mmm...”

Sungjin thought for a moment. Nada, Franz, and Serin. He had only gathered people he trusted, so he didn’t think about the possibility of betrayal before.

‘Well... That probably won’t happen. I picked them myself...’

Sungjin thought to himself as he looked up. But then Darker than Black merchant broke into a grin and said “What do you think, what if you lost your memories of the past and had run into Edward. Don’t you think you would have chosen him too?”

Sungjin stiffened up from his words. Edward had been extremely gentle and kind. If Sungjin had not regressed to the past and had met Edward ‘I would have chosen him, without a doubt.’

It was true. He had a great personality, high ability, and great skill with magic. And he even managed to gather all the parts of

the “Stories from the West”, obtaining a book equal to the ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’. Thinking of its possibility, it deeply shook Sungjin.

‘Betrayed by the people I picked, with the bonus stats that I gave...’

That would be dangerous. He had told Nada that he would conduct an interview, but an interview was nothing more than a single momentary interaction. It couldn’t reveal a person’s innermost nature.

“If I were you, I would put that eye to good use.”

“Eye?”

Sungjin stared at him. Sungjin noticed that the man’s gaze was off to the side. He was looking at his ears instead of his eyes. Sungjin realized that the ‘eyes’ he was referring to was the earring, ‘Eye of Jeremiah’, the mind reading earring. Then he got an idea ‘What if... I use it on this man?’

So Sungjin intentionally touched the earring as he said “Ahh... this. Yes, this is very good.”

The man immediately replied

“Yes, but don’t go trying to read my mind.”

Sungjin visibly withered.

‘As I thought, it doesn’t work.’

The merchant pointed at Sungjin’s hands and said

“You seem... to value that ring a lot, but I think differently. I think that earring will be far more useful to you.”

Sungjin thought about it carefully.

‘He’s not wrong.’

And then the man muttered

“Well, both of them contain power of half god half humans... but

anyway, this is it for shopping, right?”

“An.... no. I still have...16215 coins. So I want to buy an elixir.”

“I told you last time, but you can buy the Elixir in multiples of thousands.

“Then I’ll buy as many as I can. 16,000 complete transaction.”

“How cool, you are.”

Sungjin raised both his hands and replied

“I already bought everything I needed.”

The man took out a glass bottle containing a black colored liquid.
[The bottle had exactly the same design as the Holy Water of Baptism.](#)

The elixir, when bought, is always the same volume, contained in a single bottle. A 400,000 coin elixir is going to have the same volume contained in one bottle as 1000 coin elixir.

For example, we just saw in this chapter that K spent 16k coins on it and gained 3200 stats that means here 5 coins equaled 1 stat point.

Except, the liquid contained within was of a different color. Sungjin accepted it and drank it right away. Although the color was black... Sungjin felt odd and checked the bottle after he drank it.

“The color is black... but there’s no flavor or smell.”

“Well, it’s that kind of item.”

Sungjin said while looking at him with eyes full of suspicion.

“Operator, how many unallocated stat points do I have?”

[You have 3200 Unallocated Points.]

Sungjin stopped being skeptical.

“The effects are good. Then... Once the next raid is over... I will

be back.”

“As you wish.”

Sungjin placed the King’s Sceptre into the Cube as he left Darker than Black. Kargos should be close to finishing turning a Dragon’s Heart into a sword.

Sungjin headed towards the Black Market. But meanwhile, he recalled the Merchant’s words.

‘Perhaps even a rebel.’

Sungjin muttered to himself in the empty Black Market street.

“Rebel... A rebellion...”

Chapter 120 – Black Market Tenth Shopping (9)

Sungjin arrived at the Kargos's Smithy.

“Bang Bang Bang”

Kargos was diligently hammering away at the anvil. Sungjin, as always, stood by as to avoid disturbing him during his work. But no matter how long he waited, the hammering didn't stop.

It was 5 in the morning, and everything other than the Smithy was shrouded in darkness. Sungjin stood and waited for over two hours. Once the sun began to rise over the horizon, Kargos finally wiped the sweat off his brows and said

“Whew... finished.”

Whether or not it was due to the fact that the Dragon's Heart was a difficult material to work with, or because a sword had to be made from scratch, it took much longer than when he had the Moon Specter upgraded.

Sungjin who had waited with his arms crossed walked up to him and tapped him on the back.

“Thank you for your hard work, Kargos.”

“Eh. Go ahead and take it. This is your fourth sword now.”

Kargos handed the sword to Sungjin.

“Wow...”

Sungjin couldn't help but exclaim in awe. It was not because of the sword but because of the elegance and beauty of the scabbard. The scabbard which was made of steel was decorated with images of a Dragon's teeth and tongue, and flames which shot out of them. When Sungjin tilted the scabbard to inspect it closer, the flames seemed to come alive and dance.

“Wow, when did you make this, Kargos?”

“Well...yesterday morning... Dragon’s Heart wasn’t quite fully melted when I finished Artemio, so I put some work into this.”

“Thank you, Kargos.”

“Eh, you are our smithy’s regular. By the way, shouldn’t you check the content too, don’t you think?”

As he suggested, Sungjin pulled the sword out of the sheath. From the tip of the sword to the hilt, the entire blade was black in color.

It did not have a crossguard, so the boundary of the blade and the handle was difficult to find without looking closely. But its simplicity added to its beauty.

‘Dragon’s Heart’ needs to remain in one chunk he said... so is that why it’s shaped like this...?’

Sungjin thought as he lifted the blade above his head. Held like this, it looked like an elongated horn.

Nameless Sword – Nameless Sword

Legendary Katana – Strength S Dexterity A Magic Power B

Active Skill

Mana Flow (I) – Provides half of the mana used for the next 10 seconds. Depending on the size of the Dragon’s Heart, there is a limit to mana provided.

Passive Skill

Mana Respiration (I) – The Dragon’s Heart and the user restores 1% mana per second.

The first thing he noticed was the name.

‘Nameless Sword... There’s no name?’

Sungjin checked the information underneath. The Stats boosts

were on the ordinary side for a Legendary Class weapon, but it was special in that it also had a boost for Magic Power.

‘How fitting for a spellblade.’

And finally the all-important skills. Active and passive both were related to mana. Mana Respiration passive was something he could substitute to an extent with Moon Specter, so it was not all that impressive.

‘Well, it is better when there aren’t any monsters to kill nearby...’

The most eye-catching thing was the Mana Flow. Between the ‘Unique Legendary’ class swords he carried like Moon Specter, Blood Vengeance, and Artemio, the reason why he would choose this sword would most likely be in order to use this Active.

‘It can provide half the Mana cost... with this passive... Soldamyr was right... It looks like an active skill true to the nature of the Dragon’s Heart is imbued to the sword.’

Since it provided half the mana, it was like doubling his Mind Power. The only part he hesitated on was that there was an upper limit.

‘Hmm... it means it cannot give unlimited mana. I don’t know how much it will end up being... but it should be more than what I have.’

While Sungjin was looking at the sword’s specs, Kargos asked from the side.

“How is it? Do you like it?”

“Ah... Yes. I think I’ll have to study the skills a bit more but... It looks like the sword we had hoped for was made. Although... this sword... it doesn’t have a name, does it?”

“Of course it doesn’t have a name. It’s hot off the workshop. Go ahead and name it however you like.”

“Hmm... what should I name it...”

Sungjin pondered for a moment while holding the sword.

‘I don’t have much confidence in naming things... The sheath has a figure of dragons inscribed upon it... the Blade itself is made of the Dragon’s Heart itself... well... the name should include a dragon somehow, right?’

Sungjin thought for a moment about Dragons. And so he came to think of the Dragons he had met the last raid.

‘Khal Gal... and Ariane...’

And among them, he found a name he liked.

“Ariane.”

“Hmm? Ariane?”

“A person... I mean a Dragon I am indebted to... and I was wondering if it would be okay to name this sword after her.”

“Hmm, Ariane. It sounds rather feminine... I think it matches this sword perfectly. When I made this sword... I imagined a rather cold, expressionless... perfectionist mid 30s woman as I was working.”

Somehow Kargos’ image of the sword matched Sungjin’s perfectly.

‘Well... instead of 30s, she was closer to 3000s something woman... but she did look about 30 outwardly.’

Sungjin said to him

“I’ll use the name Ariane.”

“And the nickname?”

“For the nickname...”

Sungjin thought for a moment, but Kargos suggested

“What about Dragon Lady? I think it matches this sword’s image

perfectly.”

“Ah, that sounds good. I’ll go with that.”

“Then tell the Operator, that you want to name the nameless sword.”

“Operator. I want to name this sword. The name is Ariane, and the nickname is Dragon Lady.”

[Clearly state the name and nickname one more time please.]

“Name is Ariane, nickname is Dragon Lady”

[Ariane – Dragon Lady, is this correct?]

“Yes”

[This item is now Ariane – Dragon Lady. The new name of the item will be valid in case of equipping, de-equipping, or selling.]

Sungjin tried swinging the new sword Ariane once or twice. Perhaps due to being made of Dragon’s Heart, it was slightly on the light side.

“Thank you, Kargos, for making me such an amazing sword.”

“Yeah yeah. Well... when you get more Enhancement stones, bring it back. I am also curious to see how far this one will grow.”

“Ah... Ok got it.”

Sungjin nodded. No matter how good Ariane’s Passive and Active skills were, he wouldn’t be able to do more than some trivial tests for the moment.

The new sword was a rank lower than all three other swords; Moon Specter, which can imbue enemies with a powerful sense of fear, Blood Vengeance, with its immensely high damage output, Artemio, a sword specialized in hunting down mages. Thus, It could be difficult to justify using it as one of the main swords.

“Then I will see you later.”

“Alright. And the price is... oh right, you already paid.”

“That’s right.”

“Ok. Come back when you need me.”

Sungjin left behind the smithy and made his way towards Ninety Nine Nights again. He thought about Ariane’s Active skill Mana Flow as he walked.

‘Since it could basically double my mana... Even with the Ring of the Great Sage’s Active skill, I can use up to Class 4 spells. I should ask Soldamyr what spells are good to use.’

Since the Magic Power jumps up by 5 times, doubling his Mind Power barely made up the difference. He would have to focus on raising his Mind Power for a while. While he was thinking this, he suddenly had a realization.

‘Wait... If Magic Power multiplier bonus is B... it is 1.0x. And if I use the Ring of the Great Sage... [the bonus from Magic Power becomes 5.0x!](#)’

Translator’s Note on spellblade damage (In case you are wondering about multiplier dialogue)

Let’s take Magic Power to be 100.

A weapon with SSS on MP will have a 4x multiplier. So damage will be 400 (100×4).

Now take the case of this blade which has B in MP. B is 1x multiplier. When the user uses the Ring it increases his MP to 5x the original. So from 100 his MP becomes 500. Now with B on sword the damage is 500 (500×1)

So as we can see here that in this case the damage outdoes the damage of a SSS tier stat weapon when using the ring.

Even SSS grade only granted 4.0x multiplier, but using this sword with the Ring of the Great Sage Active Skill would temporarily boost the damage bonus higher than a SSS grade weapon could.

“Whoa...”

Sungjin stopped to stare at his new Sword Ariane.

Sungjin finally arrived at Ninety Nine Nights. The time was already 7:30. Rajenta and Cain had already woken up and were romping around. Sungjin who saw them play remembered

‘Ah... Right. I got another Pulp of Evolution last round.’

“Cain stay there.”

He ordered Cain to remain.

“Rajenta, follow me.”

“Kyan?”

Rajenta tilted his head 45 degrees to the side.

“I’ll give you something nice, so come along.”

Rajenta followed Sungjin away from the Inn’s courtyard. Once he checked that he was far enough from Shadowrun and Cain, Sungjin placed his hands on the cube and said

“Operator, give me the Pulp of Evolution.”

The fruit came out of the cube. And not even a second later Rajenta snapped at the fruit with his beak and swallowed it whole.

“Yeah yeah, I told you I was going to give you something nice.”

Rajenta’s body glowed brightly as he began to grow.

“Uhh...”

But he was growing much larger than Sungjin had anticipated. Rajenta was originally half as tall as Cain, but now he was much taller than Cain.

‘Whoa... I knew that Griffins were said to be tall...’

Unlike the time with Cain, no message came announcing that Rajenta had risen by a class. But he had now grown very large;

Large enough to ride.

“Kuu?”

Rajenta seemed to find it odd that the world, including his master, suddenly shrank in size.

“I didn’t shrink, Rajenta. You grew up. Can you fly now?”

“Kuuun”

Rajenta flapped his wings from where he stood and lifted himself into the air. His golden wings flashing in the light as he soared into the air was quite a sight to behold.

‘Royal Griffin? I had heard it was a precious bloodline... I can see why. But now that I think of it since he grew up this much... I might be able to bring him into combat.’

Sungjin finished his thoughts and left, leaving Cain who was barking at the flying Rajenta behind as he entered the Ninety Nine Nights. Because he had spent so much time at the Smithy, he didn’t have much left before the raid began. Sungjin showed the new sword to Soldamyr and said

“Soldamyr, this is the sword made of the Dragon’s Heart.”

“Ooh, is that right? What about its specs?”

Sungjin held Ariane up. The Operator showed the newly modified Ariane’s spec sheet with the name applied.

Ariane – Dragon Lady

Legendary Katana – Strength S Dexterity A Magic Power B

“Ooh, it supplies half the mana used? That means...”

Sungjin exchanged words with Soldamyr about the new Sword’s abilities and how it might be used when

‘Rumble...’

A sound came from his stomach.

‘Ah... it’s already time for breakfast.’

Sungjin turned to Dalupin to say

“Dalupin, for today...”

He was about to order but he stopped himself.

“Ahh, wait a second please.”

He paused to ask the Operator

“Operator, how much time is left before the raid?”

[1 hour and 26 minutes]

It wasn’t too late. It was likely time for everyone to have breakfast. Sungjin returned to his bedroom. On the table was the Information sheet he had received last night.

Sungjin brought the sheet back down to the ground floor and sat on the table. Sungjin made another request of the Operator.

“Please give me the Helix Staff.”

The staff emerged from the cube. Sungjin tapped the staff on his shoulder as he read the first line of the information sheet.

‘Information on Kariharan Frostplains’

‘Hmm, this place...’

He recalled the last time he had done this raid. He even knew where the hidden piece was. Sungjin picked up the staff as he continued to read the sheet. He thought it would be a good idea to introduce everyone to each other before the Raid began. Sungjin lifted up the staff and said

“Draft”

It was time for a meeting over breakfast. From the cube, images of Serin, Nada, and Franz appeared.

Chapter 121 – Black Market Tenth Shopping (10)

The first person's face to pop up was Franz's. He seemed like he was still half asleep, he answered while blinking his eyes.

"Hmm? Mr Kei? How did you..."

"What's this, you haven't gotten up yet?"

"I was just about to start getting ready."

"Get up, let's have breakfast together."

"But how did you..."

"I have a new item."

Then from the other side of the screen, the Cube asked Franz [The Chooser is requesting your summon. Do you accept the summon?]

He looked at the cube briefly before answering

"I'll head over after I wash my face then."

"Sure."

The second person to appear was Serin.

"What...huh... Oppa?"

She was already sitting at a table in the inn's dining room. She had her full combat gear on, and had probably completed her preparations for the raid.

"It's a new item... Have you had your breakfast already?"

"No, I was about to order..."

"Then come over on this side and let's eat together."

"Ok, I'll do that, Oppa."

Both of them appeared near simultaneously before Sungjin. They

glanced around Sungjin's Ninety Nine Nights. This would have been the first time they had traveled to a dimension other than their own.

But there was nothing in particular that they would find different. Other than the lamp and the blue giant. Sungjin said to them "Sit."

The two of them sat in the closest chair looking uncertain. And then they finally began glancing at each other. Sungjin wanted to introduce them to each other, but Nada was not here yet.

'It's easier to just do the introductions once...'

But Franz extended a greeting to Serin first.

"Nice to meet you. I am Franz Hosenfeld."

"Hello, I am Serin Han."

But there was still no response from Nada.

'What is this... did it not work properly?'

Sungjin was checking the sceptre when Nada's image finally popped up on the screen. Sungjin immediately knew why her response was delayed.

In the screen, Nada only had a bathrobe on. He must have initiated the summon in the middle of her shower. She asked with slightly raised voice "What's the meaning of this?"

Sungjin was panicking, but he replied in as calm a tone as he could muster.

"Ah... I'm trying to have all the Chosen ones meet..."

She looked past Sungjin to the two others sitting behind him. And her cube said [Do you accept the summon? No response for 3 minutes will end in automatic rejection.]

She gave her cube a look and said

"...alright. I'll be there soon."

And two minutes later, she also appeared in Sungjin's dimension. Her outfit changed to that of day clothes, but her brown hair was still slightly wet. She must have had to hurry.

Nonetheless, the four of them were finally seated together around one table. Sungjin clapped once with his hands and said "Now... I'll officially introduce everyone to each other, in the order chosen... First Franz... Your last name is Hosenfeld, right?"

Franz nodded.

"Yes, Franz Hosenfeld. Austrian. He uses a two handed sword... He's skilled and very passionate... so I picked him. After having some serious crossing of swords of course."

Franz must have remembered what had happened as he put his hand through his hair and said "Franz. Nice to meet you all."

"Second is Nada. She is from Spain."

Then she said

"Hmm? How did you know? I don't think I've told you that?"

Sungjin froze when he heard that. She had told him her nationality during the first round of raids, close to the chapter where everyone was wiped out.

"... You told me last night, you can't remember?"

"Hmm..."

Nada pursed her lips as she tried to search her memories. She was right, but she was led to believe that she somehow forgot about telling him since there was no other way she could think of how Sungjin would know otherwise.

"Anyway, she is a master of both dagger and black magic. So I chose her."

Nada crossed her arms as she said to Serin and Franz briefly "Hello."

“Finally, Serin Han. A Korean like me. An interesting fact is that she was one of the nation’s representatives in the Olympics for Archery and had won the Gold Medal.”

Franz opened his mouth to say

“Ahh... I thought I saw her before... I think I’ve seen her on the internet. On the list of beautiful Women Olympic stars....”

Serin lifted up one hand and covered her reddened face. Sungjin grinned as he said “Well, in our country she was already a national hero. She’s probably a better archer than anyone else.”

Serin bowed while keeping her hand covering her face as she said, “Nice to meet you all.”

Once the introductions were complete, Sungjin pointed at the information sheet before him.

“From now on, if there isn’t anything going on, I want to call everyone over for breakfast and speak about the upcoming raids.”

Everyone nodded.

“Then let’s order first. We can speak while eating. Dalupin.”

Sungjin called for Dalupin. All four hunters ordered breakfast from Dalupin with much familiarity. Sungjin and the people chosen by him filled the tables as they shared stories over breakfast.

“Now that I think of it... Nada uses magic, what about Franz and Serin you two? Do you use any spells?”

“No, I almost don’t use any magic at all.”

“Me too. I have tried in the past, but investing into Strength or Dexterity is more cost effective when using the bow.”

“Yeah, I know. But you have stats you got from me; Magic Power and Mind Power.”

“Yes”

“That’s true.”

“If you want to take advantage of what you have, then why not have a spell or two learned?”

“Hmm...”

“I guess that’s true as well.”

“Once this raid is over, both of you head to the Black Market to see if there are any spells that fit your style of fighting and learn one or two. If it’s possible, pick from just one color of magic to learn.”

“Yes, understood.”

“But why do we need to pick a color?”

Serin asked, but Nada answered instead.

“Titles regarding Magic tend to benefit a single school at a time. Like giving bonus effects to Black Magic, or lowering Black Magic spell’s mana costs... things like that.”

“Ah... really? I see, thank you, Ms. Nada.”

The three of them were able to hold pleasant conversations without the need for him to get involved.

“But where did Ms Nada learn to use the dagger?”

Sungjin listened to the three of them converse with his arms crossed. Now that he thought of it, picking members solely based on his own preference could lead to issues later.

In the Final 10 before his regression, there was a subtle issue between members. They didn’t always openly antagonize each other, but Illich despised Mustafa for being sly, and Araujo was always scolding Edward.

Nada also mentioned that she avoided Umkhuba for giving her strange looks, and Ryushin picked on Shunsuke for his Japanese Imperialism and caused a fight.

‘The Three people so far seems fine... but the others have to get along with them as well...’

Sungjin thought of such things as he ate breakfast. And then meanwhile, he recalled about Jeremiah’s Eye’s ability to listen to others’ thoughts.

‘...Should I test it?’

It just so happened that the only person who should be aware of the earring’s existence was sitting on his left side. Sungjin pretended to lean on his arm as he touched the earring to activate it and listened in on the others’ internal dialogue. For 10 seconds ‘How lucky to be able to share breakfast with such beautiful ladies. I’ll be able to go into the raid with full motivation.’

Franz was a very simple man. Sungjin liked this about him.

‘But even if we have comrades... what’s the point if we can’t enter the raid together?’

Nada was thinking of something else entirely different.

‘Wow, look at Ms Nada’s breasts. So large...’

Serin must have been sneaking glances at Nada’s breasts. Her ‘Endowments’ must be the subject of attention even for people of the same gender. But then her voice continued by saying ‘Now that I think of it... She called Sungjin oppa Mr Boobs...’

“Cough”

Sungjin paused from ripping his croissant by coughing. Well, at least it didn’t seem like they had any deeper thoughts about each other so far. To begin with, seeds of discontent are sown during raids; peaceful breakfast time like now couldn’t easily cause any friction.

‘Well, it would be nice if they could become friendly until then.’

Sungjin finished the rest of his food. Once the breakfast was over, Sungjin waved his hands towards the three others.

“Then let’s meet each other tomorrow morning once the raids are over, everyone.”

Each of the three others returned to their dimensions. It was roughly 30 minutes before raid start. Once everyone had left, Sungjin crossed his arms and sat down on his spot.

The next raid was another 5 man raid. After going through a 10 man raid three times alone (especially after fighting Ariane), a 5 man raid could no longer give him any sense of anxiety.

‘The next 10 man raid was... Chapter 14 was it?’

Sungjin’s focus was already set on the next 10 man raid.

‘From this point onwards... I have to set my goal to be able to take on a 10 man raid alone.’

Sungjin made up his mind. The best way to reduce uncertainty in raids was to just become stronger himself.

‘I just have to give it my best each time.’

And now, each time he grew stronger, his Chosen ones grew stronger with him. He now needed to make an effort not only for himself but also for the people he had picked.

And for a moment, Sungjin thought of the merchant in Darker than Black.

‘Perhaps even a rebel’

This was a difficult problem to solve since it was impossible to read into their core nature. Sungjin grasped his earring “Unequip”

He took a look at it. Inside the purple gem, there was a sleepy looking eye staring back at Sungjin.

‘This only lasts 10 seconds...’

Sungjin stared at the eye. But then he thought of an incredibly simple solution.

‘What if I grow so strong that it never occurs to them to rebel?’

It was true. Last time, the Friar who had been looking for an opportunity to troll was unable to dare commit the act after seeing Sungjin's overwhelming power. This might be the simplest and the most effective way to prevent problems.

'Chosen Ones get 20% of my stats... and the stats I get from Master Hunter title is 30%... so they can never surpass me using the bonuses. I will always win in a 1v1. If a rebellion is to succeed, they would need a minimum of two...'

Sungjin thought about it for a moment, how it would be to fight Serin, Nada, and Franz at the same time. Somehow, the three of them were Swordsman, Mage, and Archer; none of them had overlapping roles or position.

'Hmm... It wouldn't be easy'

Sungjin continued to play the scene out in his mind.

'So summon Cain and Soldamyr first... Have Romance of the Three Kingdoms to auto-read itself... ah, and Serin also has the Thousand and One Nights. Hmm... In that case...'

He sat for a few minutes running simulations through his mind. Sungjin eventually came to a conclusion.

'It's close, but I can just barely win.'

It would be hard, but he was confident he could win. Before Khal Gal's Raid, he would have definitely lost, but Sungjin now had the power of the Ring of the Great Sage on his side.

The main problem was being stabbed in the back during an all out brawl. This was the most vulnerable moment for a betrayal. The reason why Edward's troll led to the team's annihilation was because he had betrayed the group as they were facing the Demon King.

Edward was strong, but he could not have possibly won a fight alone against just 2 of the Final 10 members. Sungjin closed his eyes and continued to think.

‘I have to filter the members well... and monitor them carefully... and... I need to get so strong that I can remove any elements of instability so that I can bring the raids to an end.’

And then he was teleported. To the Eleventh chapter. To the Kariharan Frostplains.

Chapter 122 – Kariharan Frostplains

“Wooooooo~”

Powerful gusts of wind came from beyond the darkness. The winds were strong, strong enough to push a man down. And the snow from above rode upon the winds as they fell from the sky.

The two elements merged and covered the world in white. The mountains, the trees, the plains; the endless blizzard blanketed the entire Frostplains. And in the midst of the freezing cold was a rider galloping through the snowstorm.

Then

“Grrr”

A Sabre Tooth Tiger as tall as the rider on top of the horse blocked his way. The Sabre Tooth Tiger was the most dangerous creature to live on the Frostplains.

Its large size, its physical strength to match, its claws as strong as steel, and teeth as long as swords, and finally its snow white coat which allowed it to perfectly blend in with the environment like a chameleon, all combined made the Sabre Tooth Tiger a deadly predator. The beast slowly snuck up on his mark, looking for an opportunity to strike and then

“Krah!”

It leapt up to ambush the rider. A moment of life and death. But then, the body of the Sabre Tooth Tiger became separated into three pieces as if someone had cut it with the aid of a ruler; The head, the torso, and the lower body.

Red blood splattered upon the white Frostplains. The man who had dealt with the Sabre Tooth Tiger in a single blow, Sungjin, was muttering to himself.

“Wow... You have become such spectacular weapons, Blood

Vengeance and Artemio.”

Sungjin returned his two swords to their scabbards. The upgraded Unique Legendary swords he wielded boasted amazing specs.

Especially Blood Vengeance with its SSS Strength rating which delivered a stellar performance.

‘Well... the stats are the same as before... but having it made right after Chapter 10 is probably why it is overpowered...’

Sungjin thought to himself as he looked back into the darkness, towards the place where the snowstorm was raging. Besgoro’s Ghost vision allowed Sungjin to see as clear as day in the dark.

Sungjin focused his eyes into the distance. The Frostplains went on as far as the eyes could see. And in the middle of it was a palace made of ice; the home of this Raid’s boss, the Ice Witch. Sungjin muttered to himself.

“Thank you, Besgoro. I had such trouble last time because of the darkness.”

‘Well... Shadowrun is the one doing all the work.’

Sungjin pet Shadowrun’s neck out of gratitude. Shadowrun neighed once. The Ghost Stallion was able to run without rest without becoming cold even through this blizzard.

“Let’s go Shadowrun”

Sungjin whipped the reins once. The Shadowrun ran full speed headlong into the wind, unaffected by it, towards the frozen Palace.

The closer he got to the Frozen Palace, the stronger the blizzard became. In truth, the blizzard was the most difficult enemy to overcome. Considering the stats of the monsters in this map, they were actually quite ordinary.

Ordinary, except for the fact that the monsters, Sabre Tooth

Tiger, Yeti, Ice golems and the like were completely unaffected by the cold or the snow.

On the other hand, the Hunters were struggling to keep warmth despite the thick snowsuit and could barely move properly. Of course, none of these factors were a handicap to Sungjin.

He was already strong enough to finish this raid alone. He was only worried about the others.

He was not worried for the other four hunters he had left behind to go ahead, but the ‘Chosen Ones’ that were fighting in their own dimensions. Sungjin thought to himself

‘How are the others doing?’

*

The giant snowman, Yeti, came charging at Nada. The fingers of this monster alone was as large as a man’s fist.

Nada first escaped the reach of his grasp as she swung her daggers.

‘Woos woosh’

“Krrr”

One of the Yeti’s thumbs was cut off. The monster became enraged and came charging towards her even faster than before. Nada shouted quickly

“Domingo!”

Domingo was the name of the Zombie she brought around with her. It was the name of a classmate she disliked long ago. Domingo dove in and bit away at the Yeti’s arm.

The Yeti turned his attention away from Nada to look at Domingo. Before the zombie could be flattened, another hunter wielding a trident stabbed the Yeti at his sides.

‘Stab’

Along with the sound, the Yeti turned his attention away from Domingo to chase the hunter with the trident. The trident wielding hunter yelled out in fear

“N... Next!”

This time someone chanted

“Firebolt!”

He used the magic to burn the Yeti’s fur. The Yeti turned his attention away from the trident hunter to chase the magician. Nada thought to herself while watching the scene.

‘It’s exactly as the Master Hunter had told us.’

This was what the ‘Chooser’ Master Hunter Kei had told them during the unscheduled breakfast meeting.

‘The Yeti boasts an incredible strength and endurance, but it isn’t all that bright. Yetis tend to focus on the last person who hits them. So after one person attacks, if the next person strikes before the Yeti can counter, it will switch targets to the new attacker. So if you plan a delayed attack and take turns striking it in a circle, it will just go round and around until it dies.’

The information sheet only said ‘it is a simple and unintelligent creature’, so Kei’s instructions were far more detailed and complete, as well as being effective in battle.

After the Yeti was passed along from hunter to hunter and each of the hunters had hit it two or three times

“Kughagh”

It cried out and died.

“Oohh... it’s true, this thing... just as Miss Nada had said...”

Meanwhile, one of the hunters asked Nada

“How did you know about this? It wasn’t written on the Information sheet.”

Nada didn't have much to say, so she shrugged.

‘I want to know that as well.’

Master Hunter Kei, he had too many secrets.

*

Serin was more focused than ever before. To begin with, the strong winds made it difficult to aim the shots, and second, the target was covered in white fur, making it difficult to distinguish it from the environment. But in spite of it all,

‘Pew~’

The arrows which left her bow hit its mark at the base of the Yeti's neck.

“Kughagh”

The Yeti came charging at the hunters enraged. Serin readied another arrow as she nocked it on the bow and prepared to let it fly. Whenever a hunter was about to be in danger, she would immediately

‘Pew~’

Let the arrow fly and have the monster come after her. Even if the Yeti charged towards her, if anyone so much as grazed the monster it would change target, so the Yeti was no real threat to her.

She calmly prepared another arrow on her bow, and when a hunter was just about to be hit

‘Pew~’

She turned its attention towards her. Just by controlling the timing of her arrows, she was easily able to control the movement of the Yeti, making it easier to hunt the beast.

“Kughagh”

Once the Yeti had fallen, the hunters approached her and said

“Wow, you’re a really great shot Hassan”

“Where did you learn to shoot, Hassan?”

Hassan, as in Serin, stroked her beard as she answered

“Well, I learned it, long ago.”

The Mask even changed her voice. She didn’t have a whole a lot of meaning in picking the name Hassan.

When she was looking for masks to buy, she found one which turned her into a middle eastern man and the first name that popped into her mind was Hassan.

A common name. Thanks to it, not even other people of middle eastern origin questioned her.

‘Where are you from?’

When she was asked this question, she was a little flustered as to how to answer. But as a bearded man, one of the ‘Chosen Ones’, she was progressing through the raid without much difficulty.

Serin was already quite strong, but once she obtained Master Hunter Sungjin’s bonus stats, she became even more powerful.

She has not given it a try yet, but even if one or two allies were to die... no, even if she was all alone, she felt that she could possibly beat the regular Raid boss on her own.

The reason why she had to ensure the safety of her comrades were, that the Hidden bosses would be difficult to beat otherwise. Serin wanted to make sure to defeat the Hidden Boss this round. She already kind of knew where to find it.

‘Oppa told me...Basement of the Frozen Palace... There is a Hidden Boss frozen in there...’

During the ‘Briefing’ in the morning, Sungjin had informed the three ‘Chosen Ones’ the location of the Hidden Boss. It was a valuable information that could not be found on the information sheet. Serin gripped her fist.

‘I will defeat the Hidden boss of this round and become even stronger.’

*

The man in the front, ‘Frozen Heart’ lifted up his hand and spread his fingers. This was a signal for them to stop. Franz asked him

“Why...”

But as soon as he began to utter his words, a Yeti came walking out of the blizzard into view. ‘Frozen Heart’ lifted up his shield and gave a short command.

“Ready”

Four other hunters surrounded the Yeti upon his command. Franz was one of the hunters. Once the Yeti was in the right distance, he ordered

“Attack”

The first hunter ran in and attacked the Yeti and fell back. Franz was the second. Before the 1st hunter could be attacked, he swung his two-handed sword and stabbed the creature.

The third hunter was ‘Frozen Heart’ who swung his axe and transferred the aggro upon himself. This was the method Master Hunter Kei had informed the others to use.

‘Frozen Heart’ was a natural born leader. Once he had learned of the strategy from Franz, he assigned an attack order for the hunters and gave command during the fight.

And Franz, as well as the other hunters, found themselves naturally following his orders. ‘Frozen Heart’ had something about him.

A certain charisma that compelled people to obey. Strictly speaking, Franz ought to be stronger, but strangely, he couldn’t help but feel that he had to obey.

It was true that as an ex-military, 'Frozen Heart' had more experience with leadership. So the Hunt continued. It was during the hunt when

“Uhh...”

A problem arose. The 1st hunter who was supposed to hit the Yeti after the 5th hunter, had missed.

The 5th hunter was in danger of becoming folded in half by the Yeti's attack. Franz wouldn't watch on by without doing anything. He prepared to charge at the Yeti.

But 'Frozen Heart' reacted faster than anyone else, blocking the hit with his shield.

“Boom!”

Franz had thought he might have sustained an injury. 'Frozen Heart' was strong, but Master Hunter Kei had told them

‘Yeti's attacks are really dangerous. Anyone other than the tanks will probably die in one hit, and even tanks would have difficulty sustaining more than two hits. Probably.’

But the one to spit blood and die was not the Frozen Heart but the Yeti.

“Kughagh”

Embedded at the base of the dying Yeti's neck was Frozen Heart's Axe. Frozen Heart walked up to the dead monster with cold eyes deserving his title, as he pulled his weapon out of the beast's neck.

He directed his attention to the 1st hunter.

“Careful. A comrade almost died because of you.

His glare, as well as his words, were cold without equal. The 1st Hunter apologized.

“Ah... Sorry...”

Most people would find such cold demeanor off-putting, but

Franz who liked the strong found it to be a merit.

‘This man... even though he does not have the Chosen One title... his power is almost on par with mine’

Franz approached the man out of curiosity.

“Hey, Frozen Heart.”

“...What.”

“What did you say your name was?”

Frozen Heart looked up into the sky and then said his name as if he was letting out a sigh.

“Illich.”

Chapter 123 – Kariharan Frostplains (2)

‘Frozen Heart’ tapped on his axe as he asked

“So, the place where the blizzard is the strongest is where the Boss is at?”

Franz nodded.

“Yes.”

He narrowed his eyes as he continued to ask

“Where... did you get this information?”

Franz paused for a moment.

‘Go to where the blizzard is the most intense. The Ice Witch’s Frozen Palace is there.’

He had found out through Master Hunter K. But Franz couldn’t just tell him straight out because Kei also said earlier this morning –

‘For now... let’s hide the fact that the Chosen Ones and I can meet like this. Once you find out about the Chosen One title and its bonuses, you’ll naturally come to want the title as well. But I don’t wish to grant the title to anybody except those I really trust.’

In other words, he had to keep the morning meeting a secret.

“... There is a title. I don’t have it equipped right now, but it gives hints about where the boss is.”

“Really? Like Guide or whatever?”

Franz nodded

“Ah... yes like that.”

He narrowed his eyes even further and asked

“Hmm ok. Then what does the Chosen One title do?”

A question too close to the target.

“Well... it raises stats by...about 10%.”

Franz lied. For some reason, it wasn't easy lying to him.

“Oh, really? All stat points?”

“Uh... yes, all.”

Thankfully, Illich's curiosity stopped there.

“Really now? What an excellent title. I would love to have it myself. A great title to have as active... and 5% even when unequipped. An exceptionally fine title.”

Franz kept his mouth shut. The ‘Chosen One’ title did not grant bonus stats equal to 10% of the owner's stats, but 20% of the much higher Master Hunter Kei's stats. Unless he asked the Operator –

‘Operator show me my stats’

– there was no way for Illich to check Franz's stats for himself.

“Then let's get going. The direction where the blizzard grows thicker is... that way.”

Illich pointed towards a direction. To Franz's eye, he could not discern a difference from one direction to the next, but being Russian must have given Illich a keen awareness of the severity of the storm. Franz looked upon the man's silhouette from behind.

‘This man... I don't know about being a good human being or whatnot... but in terms of skill... he definitely deserves becoming a Chosen One.’

His combat prowess was one thing, but his level-headed judgement, his quick thinking, his ability to lead, he was superb in all ways.

‘When we finish... I should inform Mr Kei.’

Franz thought as he made his way through the snow of the Frostplains.

Sungjin held Shadowrun's reins.

“Whoa whoa~”

The horse stopped on the spot. Shadowrun’s two glowing eyes were seen in a reflection from ahead; they had arrived in front of the Ice Palace.

The Frozen Palace was made of transparent ice, and so the image of Shadowrun and Sungjin on top were reflected back at them.

“Operator, elapsed time?”

[3 minutes 42 seconds.]

“Oh really? We got here pretty quick then.”

Sungjin looked behind him and said

“Thanks for your hard work. Go rest Shadowrun.”

He returned Shadowrun into the medallion and placed him back into the cube. Sungjin who was now alone then walked up to the palace. In the time before his regression, he and his party had wandered about aimlessly for a long time before they stumbled upon the palace.

It was because the area was covered in darkness, and the only thing that reflected in the light were the eyes of the monsters.

‘How were we supposed to know that the boss lay waiting where the winds were the strongest?’

Yes, the road to the Ice Palace was the blizzard itself; one had to walk towards the blizzard which first appeared to be nothing more than an obstacle.

Strangely, the blizzard subsided upon arriving at the Palace. It was as still as the eye of the storm. He had shared this information with the ‘Chosen Ones’: Serin, Nada, and Franz.

Just knowing this bit of information would greatly decrease their chance of death to almost zero.

‘It looks fascinating even now...’

Sungjin was touching the walls of the palace when a pair of eyes appeared behind him. The creature must have thought that it had caught Sungjin unaware.

‘Well, I don’t think I’d lose even if it had ambushed me from behind.’

Soon

“Kragh!”

The Yeti came charging towards Sungjin. Sungjin hopped to the side and swung Moon Specter. Two of Yeti’s fingers were sliced off upon contact. The enraged Yeti screamed –

“Kuaagh!”

– and came charging towards Sungjin even faster, but it was bisected by the follow-up strike of the Blood Vengeance, and it fell where it stood.

“So annoying...”

Sungjin swung his sword to remove the blood from his blades before he headed into the Frozen Palace. Once inside, he saw two large columns.

One of the strange pillars was round, and the other was edged. But the pillars began to transform until it assumed the form of a giant. Sungjin thought to himself

‘Oh yeah... this thing.’

The moving columns were none other than Ice Golems. The Ice Golems looked greatly deformed.

One sported proportionally tiny legs, but one of its arms was far too long, whereas the other had an unbelievably long head.

However their physical appearances were, they came attacking Sungjin with the longest limbs of their bodies. But they didn’t particularly pose any danger.

Just by holding his swords out in defense, whenever the swords made contact with the body of the Ice Golems –

“Creak Crack”

– The parts that touched his swords fell off and became icy rubble. After blocking each of their attacks five or six times, the golems fell over on their own and stopped moving. Once the golems fell, a piercing laughter reverberated through the palace.

“Oh ho ho ho ho!”

The woman who was slowly walking down the stairs was the boss of this map, Ice Witch O’Elliah.

“You must not value your life, choosing to come here.”

She then continued to say some more useless words to Sungjin, but he didn’t pay any attention to her. He was trying to resolve a dilemma in his mind.

‘Hmm... now let’s see... where would be the most appropriate place to test the Ring of the Great Sage?’

He could only use the Ring of the Great Sage once a day. While he was thinking about it –

[Warning! Boss Monster ‘Ice Witch’ O’Elliah has appeared!]

“Then become part of my collection!”

– the boss fight had begun. Sungjin put away Moon Specter for now and took out Artemio. She immediately cast a spell.

“Spreading death”

Sungjin lifted up Artemio and shouted

“Absorb magic”

Artemio began to emit a deeper and brighter purple than ever before.

“Orb of Ice”

The orb she had created then soon burst, filling the room with innumerable ice shrapnel. Sungjin waited for a suitable timing to strike one of the shrapnel with Artemio.

Then suddenly, the shrapnel which was spreading throughout the room came rushing back into a single spot and became absorbed into Artemio.

‘Hmm... so this is how it works.’

Once Sungjin had checked the newly upgraded Artemio’s effects, he charged towards O’Elliah. Seeing her spell disappear without an effect, she waved her left hand while being unsettled. Then suddenly a tall wall of ice formed between Sungjin and her.

‘What is this?’

Sungjin cut down the wall with a single stroke of his Blood Vengeance and resumed the pursuit of the witch. Then he saw a white gaseous cloud fly towards him.

Sungjin’s eyes opened wide on seeing the incoming strike, and he tumbled backwards out of the way. The cloud was none other than subzero liquid, a magical material that freezes anything upon contact. O’Elliah expelled the white fog as she slowly approached Sungjin.

‘This one is trouble...’

The material she was unleashing was dangerous. From the first moment of contact, it slowed the movement until after three or four seconds when it could transform anything it touches into an ice sculpture.

Then she would use the sharp end of her staff which was in the form of an icicle to stab the helpless sculpture in the neck. It was a peerlessly despicable method of fighting.

Thankfully the effective range of the fog was not all that far, so Sungjin retreated a suitable distance away and then –

“Pa”

– fired his Blood Vengeance towards her. The Witch raised another wall of ice to block the sword. The Blood Vengeance became stuck in the ice and –

“Haa”

– it could not be recovered by the item effect.

‘Ugh... how annoying...’

After being blocked twice, Sungjin decided to just use the Ring of the Great Sage. He first pulled out the new sword Ariane. This sword was necessary to use the Ring. And then he said,

“Empower Magic”

Sungjin’s Ring of the Great Sage began to glow. The Witch continued to approach him. Sungjin walked backwards as he recited an incantation.

“Incinerate everything in your path”

The illumination of the ring grew intense as if the ring was about to explode. And Ariane which Sungjin held began to give off a strange sound.

“Ooong”.

Soon, Sungjin finished the incantation.

“Fireball”

Once the incantation was complete light filled Sungjin’s vision, blinding him as if he had turned on the light after spending a long time in the darkness.

‘What is this?’

Sungjin asked himself. A fireball of an unbelievable size spilled forth from him. He was too close and could only perceive it as light.

The fireball flew straight towards the Ice Witch. The Witch

erected another Icewall out of surprise and

‘BOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!!!!!!!’

The fireball exploded with a deafening roar as it made contact with the wall, but the resulting firestorm was similar in scale to his fireball from before.

Sungjin was pushed back from the spell he himself used. Soon, the Operator gave an announcement

[Boss Monster Ice Witch O’Elliah Cleared.]

At the same time

‘Drip’

A drop of water fell upon the base of Sungjin’s neck.

‘Cold’

Sungjin looked up. And when he did

‘Drip drip drip’

Several more drops fell on his face. The Fireball from just now had spread all the way to the ceiling and burnt a hole through it. Sungjin looked around.

‘It couldn’t... be collapsing, right?’

But shortly after

‘Rumble rumble’

The entire palace began to fall apart. Sungjin checked his surroundings. His Blood Vengeance that was stuck on the Icewall had fallen to the floor and lay in a puddle. Sungjin put away Ariane which had done its duty.

“Haa”

And retrieved his Blood Vengeance before getting out of the palace.

‘Creeeak rumble’

Once it began to collapse in earnest, it did not take long for the entire palace to break apart. Sungjin watched from a distance away.

He looked up and saw that the blizzard had dissipated completely. Once the Ice Witch is slain, the snow stops.

‘Whew’

Sungjin let out a sigh of relief and moved on to the next item on his agenda; Search for a hidden piece. He knew where the Hidden boss of this map was located.

But the one whose location he wanted to ask about was that of that of the hidden piece. Sungjin was about to call upon the Operator to use the ‘Treasure Hunter’ active.

But he noticed something shining from within the rubble of the Ice Palace. It was the six-pointed star which had been hanging from the top of the Palace ceiling.

‘That’s...’

The interesting thing about this star was none other than the fact that while the rest of the palace had melted away and collapsed due to the intense heat, the star alone remained intact and unaffected, giving off a light.

Sungjin approached the thing. He stood upon a fallen pillar as he picked up the star.

“Ugh...”

It was unbearably cold. But the Operator soon said

[Congratulations. You have obtained the Hidden Piece, Star of Winter.]

Chapter 124 – Kariharan Frostplains (3)

Franz, Illich and the others arrived at the Ice Witch's Frozen Palace. The two giant pillars supporting the interior of the palace transformed into two Ice Golems and came attacking the hunters.

But Frans and Illich displayed their martial prowess and quickly subdued the monsters. It was the same with the Ice Witch.

Her spells were definitely powerful and her Ice Walls annoying. Her fog spewing staff was very dangerous as well, but she was unable to put up a proper resistance between the two mighty hunters. Only once – “I'm in dan...”

– a hunter was frozen solid by her fog, but Illich came charging in with his shield like a lightning bolt.

“Shield of Conviction”

He held his shield up to block her attack and pushed her away. Franz joined the fray. He swung his massive two handed sword to fire a sharp wind blade.

“Wind Slicer”

The Ice Witch raised an Ice Wall to block Franz's attack as she backed away.

Franz's wind blade divided the wall into halves, and so Illich and the other hunters ran in to rescue the frozen hunter and bring him to the other side of the wall.

The strange thing about the Witch's freezing fog was that despite freezing the person on contact, the hunter would quickly return to normal as soon as he was warmed back up.

After 3 minutes and several clashes later

“Kyaaa!”

She died spewing blood, as Illich's axe was planted in her chest.

[Boss Monster Ice Witch O’Elliah Cleared!]

The hunters celebrated at the Operator’s announcements.

“Good work everyone.”

“You two were really amazing, Illich and Franz.”

Franz glanced at Illich.

He had only spoken on the subject of the battle, and even that little bit was communicated with as few words as possible, so Franz was unable to make a judgement on his person. But the memory of Illich rescuing the team member from the clutches of death remained strongly imprinted in his mind.

Franz became filled with certainty.

‘This man... he’s a little hard to approach... but he would make an excellent teammate!’

But Illich’s sense of leadership and personal charisma was so high that Franz worried it might make the man unwilling to listen to Master Hunter Kei.

The ‘Chosen One’ group was designed to run with Master Hunter Kei at the core. To begin with, he was three or four times stronger than anyone else, and his power was distributed among the others.

And thanks to some source of information, he even provided details about the raids before it began. It was questionable if Kei would accept Illich and vice versa. While Franz was thinking about such things, ‘Clap Clap’

Illich clapped his hands twice to gather everyone’s attentions.

“Good work everyone. Now, let’s search for the next objective. Clearing isn’t our only goal, right?”

The hunters who were celebrating their victory reformed before him at his words. Illich’s perfectionism only made him even more difficult to approach as a person. He raised his hands to ask “Does anyone here have the Treasure Hunter title?”

No one raised their hands. Franz stepped forward.

“Ah... I don't have the Treasure Hunter title... but I know where the Hidden Boss is located.”

Franz knew where to look thanks to the ‘Special Briefing’ he attended this morning.

“... Is that so?”

The man stared at Franz with sharp eyes. He seemed to wonder where Franz might have obtained such information, but he didn't pry further. Only, “Then... Since I have the Treasure Hunter title, I'll use it to find the hidden piece.”

‘Ohh...’

He even had the Treasure Hunter title. The usefulness of the Treasure Hunter passive could not be overstated since it greatly reduced the work necessary to find hidden bosses or pieces.

The man's power was starting to make sense. Contribution points were important in the raids, but obtaining items and utilizing the item to their full effect were the most important part.

‘The Chooser’ Master Hunter Kei wore rings on every finger, and every item he wore looked impressive.

Illich spoke to the cube.

“Operator, use the Treasure Hunter skill. Tell me where the Hidden Piece is located.”

The Operator gave a hint.

[Lone star in the dark night sky]

[In the middle of winter...]

Illich suddenly looked up while listening and said “Let's go towards the ceiling. I recall seeing something like a six-pointed star.”

Sungjin held up the six-pointed star.

Lathion – Star of Winter

Legendary Material

Lonely Solitary Star

But it shines brighter than any other alone.

“What is this...”

He couldn't understand the purpose of the item from the two lines of description. There was no other explanation attached.

‘Well... it's listed as a material, so Kargos should know something.’

Sungjin placed the item into the cube for now. Thanks to the fireball he had cast without much thought, he had obtained the hidden piece easily.

‘Then next on the list is...’

Sungjin took a look round. The Hidden Boss was not all that far away. And thanks to the blizzard clearing up, it was much easier to move about. Sungjin quietly gazed up at the winter night sky and then thought ‘Ah... should I try it out here?’

He reached into the cube to extract Rajenta's egg. He threw it in the air “Come, Rajenta.”

Soon a Royal Griffin revealed itself. It must have been the first snow the bird had ever seen.

“Kyak Kyak”

Cried Rajenta as he paced around stepping on the snow.

‘He's much larger... but he still has the mind of a child?’

Sungjin approached Rajenta as he thought so.

“Rajenta, I know you are enjoying it, but can you let me ride?”

“Kyal”

Rajenta calmly bent his legs to allow Sungjin to mount him. Sungjin took his place upon Rajenta's back.

"Let's go, the target is... Well, let's get in the air first."

Rajenta flew high into the sky with Sungjin. Sungjin looked down to survey the area.

'It wasn't that far...'

Besgoro's ghost vision, the fresh snow, and the relatively flat terrain all worked to allow Sungjin to see very far into the distance. He said to Rajenta.

"Rajenta, can you rotate around once slowly?"

At his words, Rajenta flapped his wings as he slowly turned around. Although Rajenta only recently became able to fly, he diligently and accurately followed Sungjin's requests. Once Rajenta had turned about 120 degrees "Stop"

Sungjin saw a group of people in the distance. They weren't moving, only standing. Sungjin whispered to Rajenta.

"That's it. Do you see it?"

"Kyak"

Rajenta let out a strange noise.

"Did you understand?"

After asking twice, Rajenta answered by flying at high speeds towards the figures below where Sungjin had pointed to. He must have seen them as well.

'He has a good eye.'

Rajenta flew towards the target at great speed. With this much speed, Sungjin no longer needed the flying carpet.

'I should sell it at the auction house or something.'

While he was thinking so, Rajenta brought Sungjin straight up to the group of people. They were all frozen solid.

About twenty to thirty individuals had been frozen in place and were unable to move. The one in the front was a middle-aged man wearing a red mantle.

‘Hmm... I have to defrost him somehow...’

He didn’t feel like spending mana just for this.

‘Well, I guess since it IS a hidden boss...’

Sungjin summoned Soldamyr.

“Have you called for me, Master?”

“Yes, please thaw this man. With magic.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Scorching hands, Burning Touch”

While Soldamyr defrosted the man, Sungjin put away Artemio and picked up Moon Specter. He now had four swords. Picking the right sword for the right situation was part of Sungjin’s most basic strategy. Meanwhile “Ugh...”

The man grasped his head as he began to moan.

“My... Head... my head...”

Sungjin did not know how long he was frozen here, but he could understand that the man might be having a headache. He simply stared at the man. If he were to attack now, he could end it then and there. But doing so would probably prompt the message ‘If you attack a non-hostile life form...’

So Sungjin stayed his hands. Within a five man raid, neither the boss nor the Hidden boss could possibly beat him.

“Why am I...”

The man turned his gaze around with unfocused eyes, then saw the people behind him.

“My... followers... frozen? I’m...”

He continued to speak to himself as if deeply confused, then he suddenly said “Yes. Witch. We ... have... to kill the witch.”

He let his mantle flutter once as he said

“Rise, Knights of the Red Lion.”

Then the men behind him began to break out of their frozen state and moved. They had just awoken and were not in their normal state yet.

Each of them grasped their head and looked around dazed. The leader with the Red Mantle looked upon them and announced “Carry out the King’s orders. Our objective... Witch...”

He grasped his head again as if he had a severe headache “No... to kill... Witch? Kill?”

And his eyes turned blue

“Yes to kill. Kill them. Kill!”

He shouted suddenly, going berserk. And at his words, each of the men behind him grasped their weapons and shouted “We the Knights of the Red Lion, will follow the King’s orders”

Their eyes were all blue as well.

‘Well... I guess it’s a type of zombie?’

While Sungjin was thinking that, the commander raised his sword and shouted “For the King! For the Golden Cloud!”

“For the King!”

That was when the Operator finally gave an announcement.

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

[Commander of the Knights of the Red Lion and his Knights have appeared.]

Sungjin said to Soldamyr after seeing them

“Let’s end their misery.”

“Yes, master.”

But Rajenta also pushed his way towards Sungjin.

“Kyaar”

“What, Rajenta you want to fight too?”

Meanwhile, the Knights began to advance towards Sungjin. Before Sungjin even responded ‘Flap’

Rajenta dashed forward like lightning and bit the knight by the head, then he flew more than ten meters into the sky before dropping him from the air. The poor knight had his back broken and died just ten seconds after being revived.

“Murderous thunder...”

Soldamyr began to chant a spell. Sungjin readied his sword and charged into the fray.

Chapter 125 – Kariharan Frostplains (4)

“Chain Lightning”

Soldamyr fired a lightning bolt,

“Kyak!”

Rajenta repeatedly plucked soldiers off the ground to drop them from high above. Sungjin also ceaselessly charged towards the enemies and swung his sword.

Three or four soldiers whose eyes had turned blue came simultaneously attacking Sungjin together, but none of them managed to so much as graze Sungjin’s shirt.

The red caped Commander himself looked as if he would show high skill with the sword, but even he couldn’t produce more than a yawn from Sungjin.

‘Clang clang cling’

In just three blows, he dropped his sword

‘Stab!’

And the next pierced through his heart.

‘Plop’

Once he fell where he stood, the twenty or so remaining soldiers were cleaned up relatively quickly. Once the short fight was over, Soldamyr came to say

“How strange. The hidden boss was so weak...”

Sungjin interrupted him.

“It’s not over.”

“What do you mean?”

Sungjin knocked on his cube.

“This guy’s still quiet.”

“Excuse me?”

As soon as Sungjin was done explaining, the Commander who was pierced through the heart earlier suddenly stood back up, bleeding profusely.

“Not like this... I can’t die like this... Until I complete the king’s order... Gather up men, we cannot rest.”

At his words, one of the dead soldiers behind him came flying and attached itself to his back, as if attracted by some sort of magnet.

Soon, one by one, over twenty other members of the Knight’s order merged into one ‘lump’ and formed a type of monster. It had dozens of arms and legs. The monster was covered in swords, shields, armors and helms. Its appearance was grotesque without peer.

“Eh....”

Soldamyr stared at the monster with his mouth wide open. Sungjin said to Moon Specter

“Moon Specter.”

‘Yes?’

“Let’s go.”

‘Yes, Master.’

Sungjin sheathed Moon Specter as he charged towards the monster. Once Sungjin got close enough to the monster made of human corpses, the dozens of arms began swinging their many weapons towards him in a jumbled mess.

It was difficult even for Sungjin to dodge them all. He kept a precarious distance from the monster as he pulled out Moon Specter from the sheath and shouted

“Ghastly Wail”

“KYAAAH!”

The immense screech reverberated throughout the Frostplains. The combined mass of knights did not respond with fear at the same time, but the ones closer to Sungjin put away their weapons.

The ‘unafraid’ upper portion of the monster attempted to engage Sungjin, but Moon Specter let out another cry.

The upgraded Moon Specter continuously reapplied fear and so the upper portion which came under its effects started to reel back. It was during this time

“This isn’t working. Shield wall!”

The Commander’s voice shouted from within the mass, and the monster’s many shields, as well as few of its helm, were brought forward to defend.

It was pointless to attack while it was in this state. Sungjin gestured to Soldamyr who was standing behind him.

“Chain Lightning.”

Enormous bolts of lightning came spewing forth and spread across the surface of the shield.

“Kaa!”

The portion hit by lightning screamed in pain and temporarily loosened its defenses. Sungjin attacked the affected area as he said

“Besgoro, Frenzy.”

‘Alright’

Sungjin shoved past the shields and activated Besgoro’s Frenzy. He then began to cut away parts of its body. Still, the abomination composed of over twenty Knights put up a fight from time to time or attempted to parry away Sungjin’s attacks.

‘Clang clang, whoosh’

Its random attacks nearly hit Sungjin once in awhile, but the

result was clear. Sungjin was able to slay his opponents without so much as a scratch.

“Damn! Show some backbone, Knights of the Red Lion!”

“Uwah!”

The enemy began to scream in sync. Sungjin felt his vision warp for a second but

[Iron Will activated]

A title he had forgotten about activated. Sungjin remembered the fight he had in the past. These things obeyed the commander's orders and changed their tactics according to the situation. From defensive to offensive stances.

It even shouted together to cast spells with abnormal effects. Like the Harpy Queen from the past.

‘I hate annoying things.’

Sungjin threw the book from his vest. Gourmet's Monocle soon began to read the book out loud.

“Inform me when the enemy approaches within ten steps. The soldier answered. They are within ten steps, sir. He ordered again. When they reach within five steps, inform me again. The soldiers shouted urgently in fear, the enemy has come. He picked up dozens of Jis in his hands as he stood up, roaring.”

[Seance of Dian Wei Elai Activated]

[Passive skill – Enhance Attack(IV), Swift(II) applied.]

Sungjin thought to himself

‘A warrior... There was something I wanted to test if it was a tactician...’

Sungjin borrowed the strength of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms to slay the human abomination.

“It's no good. Shield Wall!”

The monster reassumed defensive stance. Sungjin pondered about what to do.

‘How should I approach this?’

Originally, attacking this monster with physical attacks during defensive stance would provoke a deadly counter attack. So this was the moment when he ought to be using magic.

But Sungjin wanted to take it head on. He even had the power of the Warrior buff of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms and had Frenzy active. Head on fight was his choice.

So Sungjin approached the mountain of shields before him and used the Blood Vengeance

‘Vvvss’

To slice apart the shields. Dozens of spears and swords came from between the gaps towards Sungjin. Most warriors would be turned into pincushion from this lightning fast counter-attack, but it was not a strategy that would work on Sungjin in his current state.

‘Yeah, keep acting cute.’

Sungjin mocked the monster in his mind as he used his two swords to cut down all the weapons flying towards him. It was a clash between metals, but Sungjin’s sword emerged unscathed whereas all of the monster’s weapons were cut apart.

‘Thank you Kargos.’

Sungjin thought as he dashed head-on into the ambush. Sungjin became like a feral beast, using the power of Dian Wei and Besgoro’s Frenzy.

The Commander became panicked as he shouted

‘Retreat, defend, counter attack’

But that was all. After the body was dismembered one piece at a time, the Commander was beheaded. Even from his beheaded state

“No, the King’s orders...”

– he managed to utter one more line before dying.

[Hidden Boss Commander Lahart of the Knights of the Red Lion and his Knights]

[Cleared!]

Sungjin took a deep sigh. Numerous corpses were strewn about behind him. Died of cold, reawakened, slain by the sword, merged into an abomination, and dismembered again; they all met such horrible fates.

Unfortunately for them, Sungjin had no time to mourn their deaths. Sungjin left them behind as he activated a Trollseeker Marble.

[Dimensional transfer has been requested.]

[Before Dimensional transfer can be completed, Raid Reward Distribution must take place.]

[Beginning distribution of rewards.]

[Monsters Slain. Yeti: 4. Sabre Tooth Tiger 6. Ice Troll: 20. Total 11000 points.]

[Boss Monster Slain: ‘Ice Witch’ O’Elliah: 1400 points...]

The points he earned this round amounted to 12232 points. And the Black Coins earned was 13455. Sungjin calculated for a moment.

‘Last time...’

With the exception of the 10 man raid, Sungjin’s rewards in 5 man raids were consistently rising from round to round.

[And now we will distribute the items.]

[Ashetaut – Frost Archer’s Bow]

[Tonge – Frozen Gauntlet]

[Stone of Enhancement x2]

Two items and two Stones of Enhancement fell before Sungjin. One item was a bow made of ice, and the other was a white glove. Sungjin had yet to check the stats on the glove, but the Bow was a shame. It was not an item he could use.

‘...Off to the auction house.’

[Congratulations. Legendary item ‘Ashetaut – Frost Archer’s Bow’ Obtained!]

[Congratulations. Legendary item ‘Tonge – Frozen Gauntlet’ Obtained!]

Thankfully they were Legendary class items so they would command a high price.

‘Legendary items almost never show up on the auction house... Should I inflate the price? Hmm... Now that I think of it... It’s good to hand it off to Serin too. What bow was she using again?’

While Sungjin was thinking, the Operator’s Cube gave him his title for the round.

[Last but not the least, you will be awarded titles you’ve earned on this raid.]

[Frozen Heart – See any other Hunter’s items and stats at will. Available 2 times while equipped. 1 time while unequipped.]

He earned a curious title this round.

‘What’s this? It allows a user to check items and status at will? Is it meant to be used against trolls? To check if the opponent can be overcome?’

It would prove advantageous in fights against other hunters. If one hunter were to be aware of all the active skills and status points, he would be able to very effectively take the initiative in the fight.

Of, course it had little meaning for Sungjin. Even if three or four

trolls tried to fight him at once, there was no such individual who could seriously threaten him. And if it was more than 3 or 4 people, he couldn't possibly check their items and stats anyway.

‘Well... if that's the case... I'm sure there will be a time when it might prove to be useful. In the next Dimension... should I test it on a troll for fun?’

And then he had a realization.

‘Hmm... This would be a really good title for a troll to use... if...a troll was to have this active...’

At the top of the Frozen Palace, above the spiral tip was a shining six-pointed star. The ‘Frozen Heart’ Illich nimbly climbed on top to cut the star down from the tip.

He caught the six-pointed star on the flat side of his axe before climbing back down.

“Yiup”

[Congratulations. Hidden Piece Heart of Winter obtained!]

But then another star appeared at the top of the spiral tip.

“Hmm?”

Several hunters were surprised, but Illich explained to them.

“You didn't know? Hidden pieces are designed for everyone to take one each. Go ahead, take one.”

“Ooh...”

At his words, each of the hunters quickly took turns climbing the spiral tip to retrieve the star. Franz liked Illich more and more. Leadership, strength, and knowledge.

Illich lifted the star above his head and said,

“Hmm... this is... material. I'll need to bring it to the smithy.”

He placed it inside of his cube. Franz followed suit and checked

the star before placing it inside his cube. The next on the list was to find the Hidden Boss. Illich asked Franz.

“Hey, it’s your turn. Where is the Hidden Boss located?”

Franz took a look around. The Blizzard had ended, and the land around them was easy to see from the vantage point. With the exception of the darkness of course.

“Hmm... that way behind the palace... there should be people frozen in place. It’s hard to see because of the dark...”

“Ah, don’t worry about that.”

Illich pushed his helm further down and said

“Clairvoyance.”

Suddenly a large eye emerged from the helm and it began to look around.

‘What a strange item... I guess he found many strange items with his Treasure Hunter passive.’

“There they are. Frozen people.”

“Where?”

At Franz’s question, Illich took off his helmet and pointed in a direction. It couldn’t be seen in the darkness, but nobody raised any doubts.

The hunters emerged from the Frozen Palace together and headed towards the darkness. Not long after, they were able to come across a group of frozen men.

Author's Notes:

Romance of the Three Kingdom Reference time

Dian Wei is a deified figure in China. He is one of the two guardians/gatekeepers drawn on gateways or doors to ward off thieves and bad luck. Just like how Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zheng

Fei are deified as the representatives of three virtues.

There are two principal scenes of him, and the deification came from the second one (of his death). The portion mentioned in the chapter is when he was promoted. During Cao Cao's war against Lu Bu at the Battle of Yan Province, Cao Cao had ambushed and made advances against Lu Bu's forces. However, unluckily for Cao Cao, Lu Bu's reinforcements had arrived, and Cao Cao was forced to fight on three fronts.

Cao Cao asked for volunteers to break through the lines and end the encirclement. Dian Wei volunteered and took with him ten heavily armored soldiers. All of them carried Ji (a type of ancient Chinese polearm weapon) and long spears, no shields.

He then fought from early in the morning until dusk without end. Then when his unit was encircled, arrows and bolts came raining down upon them to such an extent that Dian Wei could not see through the thick shower of projectiles. This is when he sat down and uttered the famous lines.

“Inform me when they approach within ten steps.”

Once the enemy got close enough, he stood up with his dozens of Jis and slew anyone who approached him. He and his ten men forced the enemy to retreat, and they returned to camp when night fell. He was awarded greatly for his outstanding performance.

Now you know the context of the quote in the chapter.

But wait!

This doesn't show why he was deified. That's right, if I leave it as is, you only know half the story.

The deification came much later, during the Battle of Wancheng. The most famous scene of the poor man.

In the last moments of Dian Wei's life, he was guarding the gateway to the city which was about to be overrun by enemies. He and ten of his men stood in defense of the gateway to buy time for

his lord Cao Cao to flee. He was clad in full body armor but again wore no shields. He always carried with him dozens of Jis. As the armies advanced, Dian Wei and his ten men bravely fought against them. About a dozen of them had managed to hold off the entire army. In fact, the army was able to go around and break through a different gateway before the gateway Dian Wei defended had fallen.

He fought and killed everyone who tried to get past him. No one could approach the fearsome man and live. Even when all of his Jis broke during combat, he grabbed the men with his bare hands and broke them to pieces. The scene of his fierce fighting, despite all the arrows sticking out of him and without a weapon, had struck such deep fear into the enemy that the entire army preferred to wait until he died of blood loss than fight. Once he finally died of blood loss and fell over, the remaining ten men defended him to the end, but they were eventually overcome. Once the enemy army made sure he had died, they severed his head to make sure he didn't get back up to kill them.

Cao Cao cried mightily upon hearing the news of Dian Wei's death and had his body snuck out for funeral. Cao Cao bestowed upon Dian Wei great honors posthumously, granting him high government positions, and immortalizing him as a guardian deity; as a fearsome gatekeeper who kept Cao Cao safe despite impossible odds.

Chapter 126 – Kariharan Frostplains (5)

Illich, Franz, and the other hunters were examining the frozen group of people.

“What is this?”

“Is this the hidden boss?”

One of the hunters swung his sword to strike the figures.

‘Clang’

But it only left a scratch mark on the surface of the ice; it did not provoke a reaction. Franz who stood at the back recited the information he was told in the morning.

“A Boss... We have to find the boss among these men and unfreeze him.”

“Boss, you say?”

While the others tilted their head in confusion,

“Here he is.”

Illich found a man looking to be the leader of these men. Even with a glance, the red mantle and the elegant armor he wore easily distinguished him from the rest. One by one, the hunters gathered before him. Illich asked them.

“...Ready?”

Once the hunters glanced at each other, they gave a nod.

“Then we should begin.”

Illich reached out with the hand he held the shield and recited an incantation.

“Flames of Purification, Fire Blast”

The flames leapt from his hands and began to melt the ice of the commander. Franz glanced at Illich from the corner of his eyes.

Illich did not use magic often, but he would use spells at important moments like these.

Once the ice had melted away, the previously frozen commander woke up and began to look around.

“Ha... haa.... Where... is this?”

The soldiers also began to move about. Illich commanded

“To positions.”

Each of the hunters readied their weapons. The Battle began shortly.

Sungjin looked up into the sky. The blizzard was over. It meant that the Ice Witch was already dead.

“Where could they be...”

Sungjin entered the Palace. On the way to the roof, two hunters were fighting. Now that he saw them, they both were surrounded by a red aura. Whether they committed to trolling at the same time or if they cooperated at first and then fought over the remaining contribution was unclear, but they were fighting.

‘It’s good that they are fighting, but... I’ll can’t lose my portion...’

Sungjin hastily ascended the stairs.

“W...What the”

The two of them were surprised to see Sungjin who suddenly appeared. But seeing Sungjin charge at them with his weapon drawn, they instinctively knew

‘It is an enemy’

The hunters who were fighting each other until this moment were confused as to what to do, especially the troll who was lower on the stairs due to becoming surrounded by enemies both ahead and behind him. After looking back and forth up and down the stairs,

“Damn it!”

He swore as he swung his hammer while rotating his entire body. The hammer drew a wide arc threatening to hit both of his targets. But Sungjin easily sidestepped out of the way, and the hunter on top of the stairs dodged it by stepping backwards. In the end, his hammer only collided with the ice bridge.

‘Crack’

But that was not all. Unable to control his rotation he spun again due to the momentum and slipped on the ice, falling off the stairs from very high up.

‘Boom’

He fell with an incredibly loud noise. Sungjin peeked down at the man

“Ahh! My leg... my leg...!”

He was holding his legs and crying out in pain.

‘At least he won’t be able to run away.’

Sungjin thought as he turned his attention to the other troll. The hunter held his twin blade as he stared Sungjin down. After half a second of staring, he

“Uwah!”

Came charging towards Sungjin brandishing his two swords. Sungjin couldn’t help but grin. The hunter was slow. It was an attack the hunter had bet his life on, but it was far too slow. Sungjin used only the Moon Specter

‘Clang clang’

To break both of the swords at the same time, and used the Blood Vengeance to cut his throat.

“Uh?”

The hunter was at first stunned to see both of his swords get cut,

and when he saw blood spewing from his throat, he let go of his swords to bring his hands to his neck.

“What...”

But Sungjin had already turned to run back down the stairs. He watched Sungjin leave then collapsed on the spot.

‘It’s much easier if I just run in without them understanding how strong I am.’

Sungjin thought as he descended the stairs. But the troll was not at the bottom of the stairs. There was an empty bottle of potion left behind.

‘What?’

Sungjin looked up. The troll who had fallen was already running away far in the distance. He might have seen the other hunter being slain in a single strike.

“Hey, that’s no good.”

Sungjin quickly chased after him. The troll had abandoned his hammer in the Palace and was running as fast as his feet would carry him. Sungjin carried four swords with him, but he was still much faster than the troll. Although Sungjin was closing the distance between them, something unexpected happened.

“Krah!”

A Sabre Tooth Tiger came out of nowhere. The troll was unarmed and was brought down by the Tiger. He was moments away from being impaled by the Tiger’s maw.

“Pa!”

Sungjin fired the Moon Specter towards the Tiger. The Sabre Tooth Tiger nimbly dodged the sword but

“Haa”

Sungjin timed the retrieval in such a way that the Moon Spectre

hit the backside of the Tiger.

‘Stab’

“Kaagh!”

While the Sabre Tooth Tiger was screaming out loud in pain, Sungjin quickly ensured that the Tiger would be unable to move away.

“Binding Frost! Frostbite!”

He froze the area where it stood and

“Kerrgh”

easily beheaded the Sabre Tooth Tiger which growled at him. The Troll who saw this went wide eyed. He already fought a Sabre Tooth Tiger earlier, and seeing the fierce predator be slain so effortlessly made him realize that Sungjin’s victory over the other troll was no fluke.

“Mer... Merc...”

He was so overcome with terror that he was unable to speak coherently. But Sungjin was not someone who would show mercy just because it was asked of him. Sungjin held Blood Vengeance with both hands and was about to drive it through the man’s heart when he had a thought.

‘Frozen Heart...’

He recalled the title he just earned. Sungjin decided to try it out.

“Operator, how do I activate Frozen Heart skill?”

[Say ‘Title Stat’]

“Hmm then this guy”

The title of the man was Juggernaut.

“Juggernaut stat?”

Then an unfamiliar status screen popped up for Sungjin.

Title: Juggernaut

HP: 83700 MP: 80

Strength: 8148 7407(+741)

Dexterity: 8302 8302(+0)

Endurance: 8370 6700(+670)

Magic Power: 9 9(+0)

Mind Power: 8 8(+0)

Unallocated Points: 0

“So that’s what it does....”

Sungjin reviewed the information more carefully than his own stats. The first thing he noticed was the value of Mind and Magic power that remained in single digits. The troll had completely given up on magic; Stat of a Magic Abandoner. The man’s stats were reminiscent of how Sungjin had allocated his stats in the past. The next thing that came to view was the +10% bonus attached to his Strength and Endurance.

‘Where is this from? A title?’

But there was no other explanation apart from the title of the Juggernaut. Sungjin asked the man who still lay on the ground.

“Hey, answer me. Where did you get these bonus stats from? Is it the power of the Juggernaut title?”

The man had his mouth open and couldn’t respond. Sungjin cut off the man’s right hand with his sword.

“Kaaahhh!”

The man screamed out loud. Sungjin held his sword against the man’s left hand.

“Answer. Or I’ll cut off your other hand.”

He couldn’t bear his pain and answered.

“Yes! Yes!”

“Hmm... Juggernaut. Not a bad title. How did you get it...?”

It was far worse than Master Hunter which granted 30% in every stat, but the 10% increase in Strength and Endurance was still fairly attractive. While Sungjin was thinking so, the man stared at his hands and groaned in pain.

“Ugh...My hand... My hand...”

Sungjin said to him while looking down at him.

“You who place such importance on your own life, why do you value the lives of others so lowly as to take them? Can’t you think for a moment ‘what if the roles were reversed’?”

“That... that was... because the guy that was there ordered me...”

Sungjin immediately cut off his head at this point.

“You murdered because someone told you to... You think this is a legitimate excuse? Hmm?”

Sungjin went around picking up items the troll had dropped and placed them into his cube. Now that he thought of it, he didn’t have a chance to collect the items the other troll had dropped because he was chasing this one.

Sungjin slowly made his way back to the Ice Palace. After he collected the items left on the stairs he thought,

‘Hmm... this is a good place to make the jump, right?’

He sat on the steps of the stairs. The Trollseeker’s cooldown timer of 10 minutes was not over yet.

‘Hmm... I need to finish each one quickly... in case a Chosen One might come calling for help.’

He had instructed Serin, Nada, and Franz to call him if they couldn’t find the Hidden Piece close to the time limit, or if they were unable to kill the Hidden Boss.

Moving forward, having each of them grow stronger was in his best interest. Of course, it would be ideal if he could finish the five rounds of troll hunting before they start requesting his help.

‘Well... it would actually be best if they could do well on their own.’

Sungjin thought as he rested his chin on his hands and stared in the direction of the Ice Palace’s interior.

He was too busy fighting earlier (and in fact, he had completely demolished the one in his own realm) that he didn’t have a chance to look around in detail, but this palace was very beautiful. Sungjin gazed at the surroundings.

Of course, this dimension’s O’Elliah was dead and bleeding on the ground.

‘Although she had psychopathic tendencies... she made one hell of a palace.’

Sungjin was thinking of the other Chosen Ones while waiting for cooldown period to end.

‘Well, all of them are skilled... so they should be fine. Serin is an archer though... even if she has the power of the Arabian Nights, it would be dangerous for her to be left alone... If she has bad luck with teammates... Nada will probably do well, but the fact that she doesn’t use a mask is a problem. I should tell her when I get back today. Her figure is... way too dangerous. And Franz... well, Franz shouldn’t have any problems. He’s a man and a swordsman.’

Meanwhile, Franz was in the middle of a fierce battle. Battling the group of zombies was quite easy. But once the zombies combined to form an abomination, it became extremely difficult. If the Commanding monster shouted-

“Shield Wall!”

– Ten shields were raised all around it. And when the

Commanding monster shouted –

“Company Charge!”

– the Abomination became surrounded by dozens of spears and twice as many feet. Illich and Franz had enough skill to deal with anything the Abomination had to throw at them, but the problem were the three other hunters. They couldn't cope with changes in the Abomination's behavior and –

“Ugh...”

– took damage from time to time. Each time that happened, Illich ordered

“Pay attention and group up.”

He would reorganize the team with his commands. And Franz was obediently carrying out his orders. Once the Hunters were in formation, Illich issued a command.

“Kamel, Mohamed, Prat, charge down the center! And Franz attack from the right flank”

Franz ran to the right flank at Illich's commands. No one suspected a thing.

Chapter 127 – Kariharan Frostplains (6)

The five hunters charged towards the Abomination.

“Shield Wall!”

The soldiers of the Abomination raised their shields at the Commander’s order. Franz ran around the side and glanced at the formation as he ran by. He knew that attacking the shield during this stance would provoke a counter attack.

And from not just one but dozens of merciless swords and spears at the same time.

‘But... we shouldn’t be attacking right now...’

Franz thought to himself, but he quickly erased the thought. Illich’s judgement was excellent. It had only been a short time since they’ve met, but Franz was already thinking

‘Illich must have a good reason to give such an order. I’ll just do the best I can with what I was told to do.’

Franz who had run to the far side of the Abomination was fine. There were no shields on this side, and only a few axes, feet and helms faced him. Franz swung his two-handed sword to cut away few of its arms, legs and head.

“Ack!”

Meanwhile, he saw the three hunters back off after receiving a counter attack.

‘...’

Franz saw that but continued to attack the flank. First of all, he did feel that it was important to damage the Boss when there was an opportunity, and second, Illich the tank usually stepped in to save the situation. But this time, the Commander ordered

“Surround them!”

And the mass of monsters began to spread out in a circle. Two of the hunters quickly escaped the moving mass, but one remained.

“H...Help!”

He had sustained an injury on his leg during the fight and was unable to move, so he called for help. Franz had thought Illich might run in to rescue him or order Franz to do so. But Illich did not act to save him, nor had he ordered anyone to do so.

‘What should I do?’

While Franz was hesitating, the Human Abomination completed the encirclement of the fallen hunter and were poised to absorb him into their body. Countless swords and axes pointed inward as they surrounded the hunter.

Staying inside of that encirclement would inevitably lead to death. It might even lead to the hunter being incorporated into the Abomination. Thinking something had happened to Illich, Franz quickly swung his two-handed sword in the air as he shouted

“Wind Slicer!”

Blue aura left his weapon and made its way towards the Abomination. But

“Shields!”

Following the order of their Commander, many shields were brought to face Franz to block his sword’s aura attack. Franz tried to use that timing to save the injured hunter.

But then many spears were shot out of the body of the Abomination towards Franz. Franz gasped and jumped back. And when he did, the Abomination completely enveloped the hunter.

“Kiaaaaak!”

A cry of pain unlike any other rang out from the inside of the Abomination. Franz bit his lower lips.

‘Damn it’

He had thought he would never have to experience losing a comrade after he had received the 'Chosen One' title, but the feeling of helplessness overcame his being. Meanwhile, Illich returned to the hunters' side.

"Damn it... he was done in. We are now only four; we really need to focus now."

Franz wanted to ask

'Why didn't you save him?'

But he didn't have the will to do so. Because the Abomination which finished absorbing one of the hunters was advancing upon them, with the blades of its weapons letting out a dim red glow.

*

While Franz was busy fighting the Hidden Boss, Sungjin was in the middle of a troll hunt.

"D...damn it, who are you?"

One troll shouted out in frustration. Sungjin wordlessly pointed up towards the title above his head, where it was written 'Adjudicator'.

"What a load of bull!"

He came charging towards Sungjin wielding a sword and an axe. This man was quite fast. He was at least 1.5 times faster than an average troll, making him the strongest troll in recent memory.

But it did not mean he could match Sungjin. Sungjin simply watched him approach and swung his sword at an appropriate moment, breaking both of the troll's weapons. The man's eyes grew wide.

"How could my Legendary Weapons...."

And then Sungjin beheaded him. He then went to pick up the items the troll had dropped. One of them was the axe the troll wielded. Sungjin picked it up and the Operator followed with an

announcement.

[Congratulations. Legendary item 'Tooth of Barbarian' obtained.]

The troll must have been telling the truth.

“Yeah yeah... you were strong, but you should have known that there might be someone even stronger than you. You really thought you could enjoy all the wealth and prosperity by yourself? You'll get scolded if you do bad things. By me.” muttered Sungjin while putting the item away in the cube.

This was the third hunt, and it didn't take more than one minute. He did not know what had happened here, but the troll was left all alone and did not venture out of the palace.

It must have been intimidating for him to have to face a Sabre Tooth Tiger, Yeti, or Ice Troll all alone. But this was like avoiding a wolf and running into a tiger since he was right next to where Sungjin had teleported in from another dimension.

He fiercely fought for his life, but that was all. After all, resistance against Sungjin was futile.

*

Illich issued a command once again.

“We do it the same way, but this time the two in the middle only threaten the enemy, don't actually hit it.”

Franz thought this time the instructions were flawless. The only way to avoid the counterattack from 'Shield Wall' was to do exactly as he had just instructed.

Franz once again ran around to the right flank. But then the Commander ordered

“Shields to the flank!”

And many shields were put between Franz and the Abomination. Franz was in a dilemma.

‘Should I be attacking this?’

But no matter how he thought of it, it was a bad idea. Franz did not follow Illich’s command and only pretended to attack. Since the middle was wide open, it would be fine if the two hunters in the middle were to attack the body there.

Franz glanced at the other two. But the hunters there were really only ‘threatening’ the enemy, and not actually attacking. They were following Illich’s orders to the letter. Franz shouted out in frustration.

“Attack! The shields are on this side!”

But at the same time

“Charge!”

The Commander of the Abomination shouted. The center of the Abomination suddenly readied its spears and came charging forward. The target was the two hunters in the middle once again. The hunters separated from each other as they tried to move out of the way. The Abomination picked one hunter to chase and continued their charge.

“Uh... Uhh...”

He tried to back off, but the Abomination with dozens of feet was capable of rapid movements. Like a rail locomotive, the Abomination ran down the retreating hunter, and the hunter was flung far into the distance. There were three hunters remaining now. Franz looked towards Illich. Illich quickly shouted

“We chase after the train.”

This was when Franz sensed something strange. Until now, Illich had prioritized the survival of the hunters above all else, but this time, his order seemed to prioritize clearing the raid instead.

He ran to the front and attacked the back of the Abomination. It was quick and accurate. The remaining hunters also began to

attack the Abomination's backside as they chased after it.

It was strange as Franz couldn't help but obey him. Franz held his two-handed sword and cut off several arms and legs of the Abomination.

“Behind”

When the Commander turned the Abomination around, Illich wordlessly backed off. Franz and the other hunter upon witnessing that backed off as well. It was very strange. If it were like before, Illich would have suggested

‘Now, let's back off’

Or something along those lines. Anyway, the fact was that only three of them remained. Illich issued another command.

“This time, Franz take the middle, and we go around the sides.”

Franz was now deeply confused.

‘It didn't end up well until now.... Do I still have to listen to him or not?’

But there was no time to consider his options. The Abomination was fast approaching them. The three of them split up to face the enemy. If there was any consolation, it was that the Abomination was now much smaller than before.

This was thanks to Illich and himself working hard to cut away at the Abomination with any chance they got. Now the number of weapons and shields it had was steadily decreasing. The three hunters attacked from each side, and it was no longer able to attack or defend properly against all three. So the Commander shouted,

“Attack the weak! To the right!”

Right. That was the spot taken by the other hunter. He must have not realized that he was on the right side. He was attacking normally without much thought when his spear was knocked off

by an axe that appeared out of nowhere.

“Ugh”

“No!”

Franz shouted but a second axe came.

“Splat”

The axe accurately landed on the hunter’s head. Now it was down to just Franz and Illich. Franz began to consider activating the cheat mode, Master Hunter K.

He was instructed not to call for help unless he was in ‘peril’ because the man had ‘important things to do’. But facing the hidden boss with only two hunters remaining, it definitely qualified as a perilous situation.

‘I planned on not relying on him out of pride....’

When Franz was having such thoughts,

“Merciless”

Suddenly Illich had activated an active skill of some sort and began to cut apart the Abomination with several times the normal speed. The Commander of the Abomination continuously cried

“Shields Shields!”

And ordered the Abomination to defend against Illich, but it did not matter. Illich cut through the shields and blocked the incoming counterattacks with his own shield.

He didn’t understand what was going on, but it seemed like a good idea to assist him. Franz skillfully wielded his sword and cut away at any limbs of the Abomination he could reach.

Eventually, all the myriad of limbs the Abomination had were cut off, and only the Commander was left. Franz and Illich simultaneously plunged their weapons into the enemy.

[Hidden Boss Commander Lahart of the Knights of the Red Lion

and his Knights]

[Cleared!]

“Haa.... Ha....”

Franz took a look around while heaving for breath. Scattered around were the corpse of the other three hunters. It was a disheartening sight. Franz closed his eyes and leaned against his sword out of guilt for being unable to protect and save his teammates. But this was when he heard Illich speak.

“Operator, show me the Chosen One’s stats.”

‘Chosen One?’

Franz was shocked at what he had heard and stared at Illich. Illich’s cube was displaying Franz’s stat.

“How did you see my...?”

When Franz asked, Illich replied with another question.

“What is this... How did you get so many bonus points? These points are... 40%? 50% more than your own stats? This is beyond ‘too much’.”

While Franz was still unable to process what was going on, Illich narrowed his eyes once more and said

“Chosen One title... You lied to me.”

Chapter 128 – Kariharan Frostplains (7)

Franz was shocked. He didn't know how the man was able to check his stats, but his stats were peculiar indeed.

Master Hunter's bonus stats were massive. Illich, while looking at his stats, said to him

“Chosen One... doesn't grant 10% core stats. Strength and Dexterity are up by 30...40%... wait, those at the end... Magic Power and Mind Power are receiving several hundred times their normal value in bonuses. Just how is this kind of...”

Franz just stared at him. The man was showing such a different expression from before that Franz even wondered

‘Is this even the same man?’

Illich closed the status window and asked Franz

“This title... when did you earn it?”

Franz was silent for a moment. In the first half of the raid, he had wanted to introduce the man to make him into a Chosen One, but the situation was different, far different from then. Franz replied

“Why do you want to know?”

“Because I want it, of course. Tell me, just how did you get such an amazing title?”

Instead of answering, Franz posed the question he had since before.

“Instead of that... Why didn't you help the teammates earlier?”

“Earlier?”

“Earlier, when they were injured by the monster. Why did you abandon them.”

Illich answered with a toothy grin.

“Of course... because they outlived their usefulness.”

Franz opened his eyes wide.

“What?”

“I needed their strength to finish the raid. But they’re better off dead once the time for rewards come around.”

Franz raised his blade.

“Troll Bastard!”

Illich smirked at his accusation.

“What do you mean? Me, a troll? Do you see any red aura around me?”

Franz was enraged. He wanted to charge and strike Illich down immediately. Illich said to him

“What, want to kill me? If you attack me now, you’ll become the troll, no?”

He was right. Although Illich had committed to a troll-like behavior, he was not in a ‘troll’ state. So Franz held his sword up and did not make a move. Kei had once warned him in the past

‘Franz, you are too hot-headed. Tone down your anger. You even attacked me preemptively, remember. What if I intentionally let you hit me and then turned the tables on you. You’ll just become tagged as a troll, and I could have collected spoils from you. You know that right? When you are about to attack someone, especially when the other person has not yet entered the troll state, think first. Consider that you might be in the wrong.’

Seeing that Franz did not make a move, Illich moved his neck to the either side before speaking.

“I am a shining example of a rule abiding hunter. Their death is not on my hands; they died because they were not good enough.”

Frans considered his words for a moment before giving a reply.

“You were the one to order them to attack while the Abomination held the shield wall.”

“Yes, I did. It’s great isn’t it? As you can see, if you have them die on their own, you are not considered a troll.”

Franz raised an eyebrow.

“What are you talking about?”

“Once I understood this hidden boss’s pattern, I gave a believable order, and they listened. They were commanded to march into danger and they followed... that’s proof of their ineptitude. Those who cannot think for themselves deserves to die. They will die anyway. Nothing but parasites to my contribution.”

Franz made up his mind, here and now, to become a troll and fight this man.

This vile man pretended to be the leader and tricked others to their death. But Franz still did not charge in yet. It was because while the man was evil, he was also very strong.

‘This man is dangerous. I will lose if I run in without a plan.’

Illich had a good idea of how strong Franz was, but Franz had almost no information about him. While Franz was thinking of these things, Illich continued to speak.

“But you seem to have a brain of your own. I told you to attack the shield, but you disobeyed me... well, that’s why you’re still alive.”

‘Shoud... I call Kei now?’

But Kei said not to call unless he was in mortal danger especially when there’s still over 20 minutes before the end of the raid.

‘I have things to do. Very important things. If you can’t find the Hidden boss or Piece 20 minutes before the raid ends... then call me, I should be free by then. Probably.’

There was still 40 minutes until the raid ends. He didn’t feel it

was right to call him over while Illich was still not in a troll state and ask him

‘Please kill that man.’

Even more so if he was in the middle of his ‘very important things’. If at all possible, it would be best for Franz to resolve it on his own. If he didn’t want to bring shame to his title as the ‘Chosen One’, he would need to pull his own weight.

Franz quickly took his opponent’s power into consideration. He had tricked his teammates to die on their own. In other words, he was confident that he could finish the raid even with two or three people missing.

But he had left Franz alone. He could have betrayed Franz during the fight against the boss, but he chose not to. This means that he was not confident he could face the boss alone.

‘That means... he is almost on the same level as I am...’

But then he said

“It would have been best if you died along with the Hidden Boss, what a shame. I didn’t want to have to kill you myself.”

Franz glared at him.

“What?”

“I don’t like to get my own hands dirty. Killing someone... well it is not all that hard, but losing 10% of the reward just because I have to enter troll state is a waste.”

He had been looking down on Franz all this time.

“How can you say that after seeing my stats?”

Franz asked Illich, and he answered saying

“Yes, we both saw. Your bonus stats are massive... but it’s still not enough. You can’t beat me.”

Franz readied himself to fight.

“Ok, we shall see about that.”

Illich raised his shield.

“I like these raids. Five to ten hunters are all perfectly isolated. If everyone else dies, there is not a way anyone can find out that I have trolled.”

“You...”

“Yes, every single hunter who has ever seen me thus far has died. So there is no possibility of a rumor and I can do this chapter after chapter. As an undiscovered troll.”

Franz no longer wanted to hear a single more word out of Illich’s mouth. He raised his sword high

“Yaaa!”

And charged at him.

*

Sungjin returned to the Ice stairs to gaze down upon the troll he had just killed.

‘Does this mean... only the trolls can become the strongest...’

Sungjin had been able to go from dimension to dimension to earn an unparalleled number of black coins, but if he had not been able to take such a route, the only way to make himself noticeably stronger than others was to commit to trolling.

Even with the penalty, if one or two people were to die, his portion would increase by several times.

When the Raids first began, not many realized this, but as the raids continued, more and more people figured this out.

And once they do, trolling becomes incredibly attractive. If the contribution meant for five hunters were to be divided among 3, 2 or monopolized by a single person, then the amount of stats and coins one could earn would increase multiplicatively.

As Igor had said in Kutan Desert, the Reward system heavily favored the trolls.

‘Is this why there are endless number of trolls... Well, at least I can earn a bit more coins this way...’

‘Now that I think of it... that means it’s entirely possible that people other than Ed had risen to that spot by trolling.’

It was true. The final 10 from the previous life had all been people of immense strength and skill. They were originally star athletes, soldiers or somehow gifted with unusual amounts of magic power; people who were especially talented in combat all with equipment and weapons to compliment their fighting style, backed up by enormously high status points. In simpler terms

‘They got more points because they were more skilled’

Was one possibility, but this was no guarantee. Any one of the final 10 could have regularly trolled to obtain their position. Sungjin rested his chin on his hands as he sank into thought.

He was close with four of the hunters. He felt that he understood those four very well. Hildebrandt, the father of three daughters, would have never done it. He was a good man. Sungjin could not bring himself to imagine him choosing to carry out such a deed.

Mustafa was a pious Muslim with strong faith in his God. He always offered prayers before battle, and was always the first to run to help anyone hurt to heal them.

People of Islamic faith were painted in poor light in Korean Mass Media, but Mustafa was a warm and kind individual. He was also very unlikely to have ever trolled.

He had spent a long time with Nada and had plenty of opportunities to observe her, but she was also definitely not a person who would troll. It was the same now as it was then, she was a woman who was more likely to be the target of trolling, rather than the one to initiate it.

Edward was already proven guilty. He who was the one responsible for annihilating the previous team had no excuses. He had always sported a friendly smile, but that kind of face might have proven to be an extremely useful tool in trolling.

He didn't know until the last moment, but he could have possibly been killing others on his way to the top.

‘Edward, Check’

Sungjin crossed out Edward's face in his mind.

The rest were people he did not know very well. First was the master of Spearmanship, Ryushin. Ryushin was someone who regarded his spearmanship very highly.

‘Our Martial arts clan had defended justice generation after generation...’

Due to his inflated pride, he had often bickered with other hunters, but also because of pride, he was very unlikely to have ever trolled.

Next was Araujo. Araujo was a professor slash soldier who loved to lecture others. A witty and fun loving man, he seemed far from someone who would troll.

Next was Umhkuba. African aborigine, he had grown up far removed from civilization so if he had ever felt that ‘I need to troll’ he would have done so without any doubt or hesitation.

‘Umhkuba check’.

Shunsuke was so quiet he had never conversed with him. Because Sungchul had seen him speak on few occasion with others, he could kind of tell that he was a man of few words who only spoke when it was absolutely necessary so he couldn't make any sort of judgement as to his character.

‘Shunsuke...defer judgement.’

Last was Illich. A cold man. An ex-soldier. He had keen

judgement and excellent leadership, but he was unforgiving when the team deviated even slightly from his plans.

‘If it is Illich...’

Sungjin looked up at the ceiling as he imagined for a moment. If he ever concluded that trolling was beneficial, he would likely carry it out.

Even if it was morally wrong to do so. The more Sungjin thought of it, the more likely it seemed that he would do it. Sungjin put three stars next to his face in his mind.

‘Illich... check check check.’

Then,

[10 minutes have elapsed since arriving in this Dimension.]

The Operator let him know. He always set an alarm with the Operator so that he would know as soon as the Trollseeker marble came off cooldown.

“Hmm... Total remaining time?”

[42 minutes 21 seconds.]

“Ok.”

The raid started with very little extra time for Dimension hopping, but he still somehow managed to leave enough time to go on two more troll hunts. Sungjin picked up the Trollseeker Marble. This was going to be his fourth hunt. There were two marbles left in all. Sungjin then said,

“Pursuit of Justice”

A pillar of light descended from above once more. While receiving the light with his entire body, Sungjin had a thought.

‘Hmm.. It might even be possible that I run into Illich, Umhkuba or Edward using this.’

Chapter 129 – Kariharan Frostplains (8)

‘Clang!’

The battle began when Franz’s two-handed sword was blocked by Illich’s shield. Illich brandished his axe the moment he blocked the sword while Franz spun his wrist holding his blade like a windmill to deflect his opponent’s axe.

‘Claaang!’

There was a loud sound of collision when the blade and the axe met, but Illich’s attacks did not end there. As the axe and the blade collided, he turned his body, trying to hit Franz with the shield. Franz blocked the shield by lowering the positions of his hand on the grip of the blade.

‘Swooom.’

His body was pushed into the air upon blocking the attack. A distance was created between them and the men temporarily resumed watching each other for the next move.

Here Franz thought, “He really is amazing.”

Franz had learned to gauge the relative strength of his opponent by crossing blades at least once. And this man was strong.

When he compared the ways the weapon was used, its speed, his enemy’s movement, to that of the trolls he had fought against and against his battle with Master Hunter Kei, he realized that Illich’s might was very evenly matched to his despite the fact that he had the title of the ‘Chosen One’ which granted him a super buff.

‘If I didn’t have this title, I would have been the one at a disadvantage.’

While Franz was thinking all this,

‘Wooooooh!’

Illich charged at him with his shield held in front. Franz was about to dodge to the side and strike at Illich, but at that moment, Illich spun around once and without even looking, he swung his axe. It countered the originally sidestepping motion and was not something that could be evaded. Franz swung his blade against it, trying his hardest to stay on target and land a shot.

‘Poof’

‘Pzzzzt’

Illich’s axe penetrated Franz’s shoulder armor and at the same moment, Franz’s blade nicked Illich’s thighs.

“Urgg”

“Ugh...”

Each of the hunters took a step back, away from each other as if they had agreed beforehand. Both Franz and Illich’s cubes sounded out with the Operator’s voice:

[You have attacked your fellow Hunter. Entering ‘Troll’ state.]

[Hunters in ‘Troll’ state receive 10% penalty to Raid Rewards.]

[And in the event that the Troll is killed by other hunters,]

[It will not inflict the ‘Troll’ state on the attacker.]

Such was the irony for Franz who now became the troll he so despised. But Franz decided to think of it differently because Illich was evil. Whether Franz would become a troll to the system or not, he would still think that removing Illich was a necessary and a just deed.

“Ooooooh ha!”

Franz lifted up his blade up and shouted,

“Electro!”

Electricity started flowing from his gloves and went into his blade.

‘Pzt! Pzzzzzzt!’

Illich watched Franz charge up. Franz couldn’t give Illich the time to analyse and when he felt his blade was almost fully charged, he dove in towards Illich and swung his blade in a wide arc in the hopes that Illich would block with his shield.

But Illich dodged Franz’s attack instead of using his shield to block it. He must have instinctively felt that he shouldn’t block with his metallic shield. Franz bit his lips. Making calm, detached and detailed decisions were what Illich was best at. Franz tried to catch him, but Illich held out his hand and called out a spell to push him away,

“Push away my enemies! Gust!”

Franz moved his center of gravity using his blade and landed while spinning. But the moment he landed, his blades were discharged after having touched the snow on the ground, melting the area around him.

The only reasons why he was able to use electricity in his attacks was because of his gloves, ‘Electro’, and its inductive properties. Excluding them, none of his other equipment had inductive properties. He could even get electrocuted himself if he wasn’t careful. He lifted his blade but noticed that the power contained in his sword had significantly decreased, most likely dissipated into the snow and water. Franz looked at Illich.

‘Did he calculate this as well?’

At that moment, Illich looked at the blade and said,

“The power of Lightning, interesting. Then I shall prepare myself too.”

He held his axe and said,

“Phantom Edge.”

His axe glowed with a mysterious and menacing blue aura.

‘What’s that?’ thought Franz, but Illich ran up to him immediately. Franz took a defensive stance to explore the capabilities of the modified axe. He blocked the flying axe with his blade.

‘Clang!’

It was a perfect block using the wide side of the blade, but the blue aura of the axe passed through. Franz didn’t think much of it because it didn’t look like much, but when it reached his fingers, he felt unspeakable pain and cried,

“Argggg...”

Franz jumped back, barely holding onto his sword. His fingers felt as if they were burning from the phantasmic blue aura.

‘What? Fire?’

Illich didn’t give Franz the time to think and continuously swung his axe, feeling that his attacks were going through. Every time he swung his axe, a similar blue blade aura flew out from it, cutting the air and audibly making it sound dangerous.

‘Fwoom~ Fwoom~’

Like Illich had done earlier, Franz concentrated on dodging the blows rather than blocking them with his blades.

‘That’s a dangerous blade aura. Let’s dodge them for now until it gets extinguished.’

Each and every active skill has a time limit; Franz decided to drag the fight out till the end of its active time. They both had similar speeds anyways. Franz didn’t think it was difficult whilst retreating backwards. As he saw Illich make a big swing, he dodged by bending down, but when look looked back up, he saw that Illich had used the momentum of the swing to spin around and launch an attack on him using the shield in his left hand.

Franz, who had been concentrating on dodging the axe blows,

took a proper hit from the shield and fell back.

‘Boom!’

“Ah!”

Illich spared no time in taking advantage of the situation and jumped at Franz while holding his axe. Franz had no choice but to block the incoming attack.

‘Clang!’

He could see the blue edge passing through beyond the sound of colliding swords and could finally figure out what it was. He was able to realise it when he took in an immensely cold breath of air whilst fighting Illich.

‘This is... It’s similar to the attacks which the Ice Witch had used.’

The pain he felt on his fingers wasn’t the pain of burning, but of being frozen.

‘Oh no!’

“Die!”

Illich pushed down on Franz, by adding on more strength into the axe. The cold blue edge started reaching down on Franz’s nose.

**

Sungjin looked around him.

“Hmm..”

The fourth dimension was empty, only having the corpse of the Ice Witch. There were no corpses of dead hunters or the sounds of fighting trolls. This meant that the trolls of the current dimension must be outside, somewhere in the frostplains. Sungjin’s face crunched up.

‘Darn it... I’ve come to an annoying dimension.’

There were only 40 minutes till the end of the raid and he had to

go hunt trolls from another dimension using his last Trollseeker Marble. Sungjin climbed to the roof and saw that the hidden piece, the Star of Winter, was missing.

‘Ho... Well, would you look at this?’

The ‘Star of Winter’ didn’t really qualify as a ‘Hidden’ piece since it wasn’t exactly hidden and looked like an ordinary ornament of the palace, which Sungjin had luckily found (although he found it by melting the whole palace). But it must have been an incredibly hard to find item. To have found this, there must have been a capable hunter in the team.

‘Then I wonder where this fella might be...’

Sungjin looked beyond the shadows using Besgoro’s Ghost Vision. He could see the corpses of a Yeti and a Saber-Tooth Tiger behind the Palace.

‘It must be in that direction.’

He looked further beyond the area and found countless arms and legs which had been cut up along the bloodied frostplains.

‘...They killed the Hidden Boss?’

Sungjin jumped down, sliding down on the sides of the palace, then jumped again when he reached around half way. Although it was a little high, having equipped ‘Diora – Pants of Feather Fall,’ its passive was able to negate most of the damage from falling from the height. As soon as he landed, he used “Swift Paw!” and ran explosively along the frostplains.

‘If they could find the Hidden Piece.. and could kill the Hidden Boss as well. Surely this party is strong,’ Sungjin thought.

He heard the sounds of battle around where he found the corpse of the Hidden Boss.

‘I’m almost there.’

Sungjin took out Moon Specter and Artemio out of his four

katanas as they were effective against multiple targets. When he moved past the corpse of the Hidden Boss, he was taken by surprise! It was because there was a familiar face in the crowd. Sungjin said his name aloud,

“Baltren?”

The man fighting against the troll was Baltren. He was the Black Policeman Sungjin had met in the first Chapter. But he was now bloodied, barely blocking the blows against the troll. Sungjin ran towards him without hesitation. Baltren was being harassed by the troll who was a Spearman, attacking him from a distance.

“Give it up, mate! You think you can drag this on for another 40 minutes?”

But it took no longer than 4 seconds to stop his attacks.

“Clang!”

Sungjin brushed his spear aside,

“Swipe”

Cut off his wrist,

“Poof”

And kicked his torso.

“Kuuk...”

He couldn't even shout properly on having his torso kicked squarely, and became stuck in the snow. Sungjin walked up to him and killed him on the spot.

“Kuu....”

Sungjin turned around to look at Baltren despite having two items drop from the troll. Baltren stared and blinked dumbly at the newly developed situation. He only recognised who the ‘Adjudicator’ was after the person took off his helmet.

“You’re... Master Hunter! Kei!”

Baltren came up to Sungjin despite losing blood and grasped his hands.

“It’s so good to see you again, Master Hunter Kei! Do you remember what I said when we parted ways last time? That we will meet again.”

Undoubtedly, seeing someone familiar from previous raids was a welcoming thing. Sungjin also felt happy, smiling he said

“It’s good that you’re still alive. Very good.”

Chapter 130 – Kariharan Frostplains (9)

“It’s very nice to see you again. You’ve... survived well.”

Hearing Sungjin speak, Baltren respectfully replied, “That time, the Heroic club you’d given me at a very low price allowed me to get through the early Chapters without much trouble. Of course, as the time passed the raids became more difficult... but thanks to the club I was able to get much higher contribution points in the starting Chapters, which greatly helped me survive. It’s all thanks to you I was able to make it this far.”

In response to Baltren’s thanks,

“No, you should give thanks to your leadership and decision-making abilities,” said Sungjin humbly. But he did feel that Baltren was also somewhat right in saying that.

From his experience, in the starting chapters Heroic tier items would drop only if the Hidden Boss was killed and the raid reached 100% completion, and even then it would only drop for the hunters who managed to obtain a minimum of 20~30% in raid contribution. So out of 100 points total, the hunter would have to have 20 to 30 points at the very least; it would be difficult for any brand new hunter, who was busy trying to adjust to his circumstances, to achieve such a result.

Even if someone were to monopolize everything (more specifically if everyone else in his team had all died in the raid), the Hunters who didn’t yet have a clear understanding of how Rewards were calculated would probably avoid going out of their way to seek out more monsters. So obtaining a Heroic level item from Sungjin at Chapter 1 was a major blessing. Just by having the exceptional weapon, he had started off a few steps ahead of others.

Baltren suddenly scratched his head and apologized, “I’m sorry, but...”

Sungjin looked confused.

“I sold the club to the weapons shop when I found something better,” Baltren said.

“No, I understand. We’re at Chapter 11, and you shouldn’t be using Heroic level items.”

“Thank you for understanding.”

“No worries. It’s a normal thing to do, anyways.”

Sungjin snuck a look at the club Baltren held as he spoke. It was a completely black colored glossy blunt weapon, from the handle to the tip. On taking a closer look, Sungchul came to a realization that it closely resembled his sword Ariane.

“This club was... crafted using the Dragon’s Heart?”

Baltren was surprised at Sungjin’s remark.

“Oh... I knew you’d recognise it!”

“It would have been hard for you to find the hidden piece there...”

“Ah, I have the title, Treasure Hunter. This title allows you to...”

“I have it too.”

“Oh of course you do! I guess I’m trying to show off in front of the true Treasure Hunter.”

“It’s okay. The Treasure Hunter’s a great title to have,” said Sungjin.

“Yes. Having seen Mr. Kei look for hidden elements... I tried looking for them myself, and then was able to earn the title Treasure Hunter.”

Now that Sungjin looked at him, he realised that the club wasn’t the only thing he gave to Baltren. This police officer was quick-witted and must have followed his example in looking for the hidden bosses.

“After getting access to the active skill of the Treasure Hunter title, I’ve searched for as many Hidden pieces as possible. Well, there have been many instances where I would have lost my life to the Hidden bosses as well.”

“Wow, I see.”

Sungjin came to realise who had found the hidden piece, ‘The Star of Winter’, in this group.

‘I guess he’s got the skills...’ thought Sungjin, never having expected that the treasure hunter had been Baltren.

Sungjin asked, “What happened during the raid?”

“Oh... We managed to clear the Boss and found the Hidden Piece without losing anyone... But... It was the Hidden Boss that caused us problems. We weren’t fully prepared for the changes in its stances... and lost a few men.”

‘Changes in stances?’

He momentarily thought back to his past memories before regression and nodded.

‘Oh yeah. There was such a thing.’

When Sungjin first met the Hidden Boss, his group had no teamwork and thus, were nearly wiped out about half way through. He didn’t remember about the changes, since they were just cut down, regardless of whether the Hidden Boss was in an aggressive or defensive stance.

“Only he and I remained,” said Baltren while pointing at the dead troll slain by Sungjin.

“We originally had two spearmen. After we narrowly defeated the boss, I just barely managed to survive whereas that man came out unscathed. While I was catching my breath, he began to attack me.”

“I suppose he was envious for the other half of the contribution.”

Baltren grinned as he answered

“It was probably more than half. With the exception of Chapter 1 where I met you, I have maintained 1st place every round.

“Oh... is that so?”

Baltren confidently nodded twice.

“Yes”

Sungjin examined him from head to toe. Not only did he have a club made out of Dragon’s Heart, but he had good looking equipment from his helm down to his boots as well. He must have been able to grow stronger thanks to Sungjin’s item and hints.

‘This man... he’s become very strong. And I think I can trust him. He was always compliant since Chapter 1.’

With this much merit, he definitely qualified to be made into a Chosen One.

‘But... I should still give my due diligence. Then... should I give him a final test?’

Sungjin intentionally sat down on a log and began to converse with him.

“So, how did you manage to get this far? Is this the first time you faced a troll?”

“Ah, so what happened is...”

Sungjin was catching up with Baltren after their long separation. His plan was to hold some idle talk for a while and then activate ‘Eye of Jeremiah’ without him noticing. It wouldn’t last very long, but it should allow Sungjin to check his sincerity.

“For me, the Magician’s Tower was particularly difficult. Of course, all raids were hard as well...”

Sungjin waited for the right timing to touch his earring.

While Sungjin was pleasantly exchanging words with Baltren, Franz was busy dodging Illich's Axe.

"Woosh"

The Axe reached close to his face. And then the ethereal blue blade cut his lip. Franz who was breathing out from his mouth found his lips were suddenly frozen together. He swung his sword menacingly-

'Woosh'

-to push Illich away. And only after 2~3 seconds-

"Haa!"

-did his lips unfreeze on their own accord.

'Incorporeal freezing Blades...'

Franz couldn't really complain since he too used a sword imbued with the power of lightning, but this chapter just happened to be taking place in a Frost Plain. His sword lost its power when it came in contact with water or snow, whereas, Illich's axe seemed to get stronger over time.

'Damn it...'

Franz swore as he fixed his grip on his two-handed sword. He couldn't feel his left leg any longer. Earlier when he deflected the axe while he was down, the weapon had hit his leg before he knew it.

'Is it frostbite?'

Franz thought as Illich began to walk sideways while keeping his narrowed eyes on Franz like some sort of predator. He walked around in clockwise direction with Franz in the middle. Franz was forced to turn to meet him.

'Why is he doing this?'

Even when he fought Kei

‘This is his the way he fights’

Franz was able to somewhat guess what Kei was doing (only that he was physically unable to keep up). But, he could not read into what this cold man was thinking or how he was going to attack next. It was then, Illich suddenly changed directions and began walking the other way.

‘Damn it, what is he up to?’

Franz thought, but then Illich suddenly charged towards him. Franz quickly swung the sword in his hands. One advantage of his sword over Illich’s axe was reach.

Being able to hit first was a major advantage. Franz aimed for Illich’s body and launched a horizontal swipe. But Illich lowered his body to the point that he dove to the ground.

“Woo~sh”

Franz’s swing went wide. For a moment, he thought.

‘Oh no’

But then Illich’s Axe also did not connect.

‘Woosh~’

Franz who quickly corrected his posture stared at Illich.

‘What happened?’

He had shown a fatal opening, but Illich did not strike him. Illich would never have permitted such a mistake to happen in ordinary circumstances. But regardless, it was an opportunity for Franz. Franz readied to strike Illich who was still on the ground, but his left feet would not budge.

‘What?’

Once Franz looked down at his feet, he realized that Illich had not made a mistake. His axe, or more specifically, the ethereal blue blade had not missed but had struck his left thigh a second time.

His leg was already numb, so he didn't notice when it paralyzed. When Illich had walked clockwise and then counter clockwise, he must have been checking to see if his leg was fine or not.

Franz was unsure as to what to do, so he dragged his unmoving leg as he backed off. Meanwhile, Illich stood up from where he lay.

Franz began to fear for his life. Illich was a master of combat and mind games. Franz had certainly felt fear when facing Master Hunter Kei, but that fear was derived from the absolute difference in strength. The fear he felt from Illich was akin to what a viewer of Science Fiction movie might feel on seeing mindless, heartless war machines coming to end humanity.

He couldn't help but feel compelled to ask Master Hunter Kei for assistance. Franz was a man with a strong sense of pride, but the current flow of combat had removed his inhibition. He thought to himself as he watched Illich approach him.

'I will lose at this rate. He will kill me without even batting an eye.'

*

"So you've never trolled before?"

"Of course."

Baltren's thoughts flowed into Sungjin.

'What a strange thing to ask'

"I wish for all the hunters to work together and end this raid once and for all. Of course, I understand that there are trolls all over the place..."

'I don't know why he's asking me this... but I'll give him a proper answer. This man might have the potential to save humanity, so I need to do whatever I can to assist him.'

Sungjin who heard Baltren's thoughts suddenly said out of the blue "Baltren you passed."

“Eh? Passed?”

“Yes, Passed.”

“What did I pass?”

Sungjin took the Holy water of Baptism out of his vest and showed it to him.

“You’ll find out shortly.”

“Excuse me?”

“You believe in me, right?”

“Yes... of course.”

“Then please allow me.”

And in a similar fashion as he had done to the other ‘Chosen Ones’, he baptised Baltren. After that he gave a brief primer on the functions of the ‘Chosen One’ title.

“My goodness, 20% of your stats is granted as bonus stats to me?”

“Yes. And...”

But then the Operator interrupted him with an alarm.

[10 minutes have passed since entering this Dimension.]

Sungjin stopped himself short there. He still had one more Trollseeker Marble left to use. Sungjin said to Baltren.

“If you open your status window now, you will understand. The title is already active at half capacity. The rest of the details, I will meet with you at dinner time and tell you then. I have somewhere I need to be.”

“Ah... ok.”

Leaving the confused Baltren behind,

“Pursuit of Justice”

Sungjin transferred dimensions once more.

Chapter 131 – Kariharan Frostplains (10)

‘Voom’

Sungjin arrived at the final, the fifth dimension with a bright light. But as soon as he arrived, he realised he had made a mistake.

The place he arrived, as he jumped dimensions, was near where the Hidden Boss resided. And in the current dimension, the Hidden Boss was still alive and well.

‘Then... The Ice Witch might still be around somewhere.’

Sungjin tried to look for the Ice Palace, but the raging blizzard would not let him.

‘...Huh?’

The blizzard was still raging on – it meant that the normal Boss was still alive.

‘Sigh... There’s a troll in a team that still hasn’t killed the Boss? What a messy team.’

“Operator, how much time is left for the raid?”

[32 minutes 6 seconds.]

‘Hmmm....’

There were only about 30 minutes left, and the dimension’s party members must be somewhere on the Frostplains. Sungjin looked around him, barely opening his eyes. It’s normal for internal conflict to happen. Usually, hunters get emotionally unstable on the way to the Boss, when one or two members are injured or they die.

But in an extreme situation like they were in currently, where the troll had killed the rest of his team, or the surviving hunters had killed the troll, it was unlikely for the remaining hunter(s) to be able to kill the Boss.

If that were the case, then they would usually die from being bitten to death by monsters, going over time or even suicide. So he had to find the remaining hunters, troll or not, as soon as possible.

But the issue was that it was extremely difficult to find anyone in a blizzard like the one he was in. His ghost mount who was especially effective in such circumstances, Shadowrun, was now resting in the stables of Ninety Nine Nights.

‘This is annoying.’

It was impractical to look for them through Besgoro’s Ghost Vision, as its range was limited. It was impossible to know where anyone was in the Frostplains.

‘...What to do?’

After brooding over it for a moment,

‘I can only trust...’

Sungjin thought and called out his last familiar, Cain. He threw out his wolven wooden sculpture and Cain was summoned with a ‘poof’.

Cain stood on top of the plains and groaned, “Grr....” with his tongue out and blinked. It looked like he was having difficulty adapting to the weather conditions, but he was Sungjin’s most trusted familiar.

“It’s really cold, isn’t it Cain? Sorry. For calling you out here,” Sungjin said, clinging onto his neck.

“Woof.” Cain gave a short bark. But he stood still; it must have at least been bearable compared to the time he was summoned in the Kutan Desert.

“Can you smell any Hunters here?” Sungjin asked.

“Sniff...sniff”

After sniffing around a few times, Cain responded without much confidence,

Sungjin felt at a loss for what to do when even his trusty Cain looked stumped.

“Really? What should we do?”

While Sungjin was biting his lower lip,

“Awoo~”

Cain let out a howl. And soon, smaller wolves began to appear around Cain. From Dire Wolves which were only slightly smaller than Cain to Gray Wolves which were only half as tall, once twenty wolves had been summoned, Cain let out another cry.

“Ao~ Ooowo~”

It was an entirely different cry from earlier, one which had a variety of tones. The wolves spread out and dispersed into the Frostplains upon hearing the cry.

“Ooh...”

Sungjin couldn't help but exclaim, and Cain turned to look at his master as if to say 'praise me'. Sungjin patted his head.

“Good job Cain.”

Sungjin watched the wolves run off into the distance. They ran fiercely through the wind despite the raging blizzard. Sungjin recalled the wolves of the Ahenna Forest.

‘Well... the wolves were better at cooperating than most people.’

While Sungjin was lost in thought, the Operator gave an announcement.

[The Chosen One requested your teleportation. Will you accept the request?]

‘I'm not done hunting trolls though...’

Sungjin glanced towards the Cube for now. On the screen appeared an Arab man wearing a turban. An Arab man he was unfamiliar with. Sungjin thought for a moment

‘Who?’

But then the man spoke.

“Oppa”

That was when Sungjin realized who it was. There was only one person who would call him ‘Oppa’. She was Serin. But listening to a turban wearing middle-aged Arab man call him Oppa felt very strange.

“Ah... um, what is it Serin?”

“Where is the Hidden Piece in this raid? We can’t find it”

“Did you kill the Hidden Boss?”

“Yes, just now. But we can’t figure out where the Hidden Piece is located. No one in my party has Treasure Hunter either. Can you come find it for us?”

“I mean... go back to the Frozen Palace of the Ice Witch and search on the roof. There is a star shaped thing. That’s the Hidden Piece.”

“Ah really?”

“Yes. Go ahead and collect it. I’m busy and can’t go there right now.”

“Ok got it. Sorry Oppa, for bothering you.”

“No, it’s not a problem. Go get the thing now.”

“Okay~”

Once he finished his conversation, he told the Cube

“Reject request.”

[You have rejected the teleportation.]

Sungjin was glad that the issue could be solved with a simple instruction. If she had asked him to help her kill the hidden boss, Sungjin would have had to choose between hunting trolls or going

to help her.

‘I’m glad it was nothing major.’

But, then he heard another announcement from the Operator.

[The Chosen One requested your teleportation. Will you accept the request?]

Sungjin stared at the Cube. This time it was Nada.

“Hey Kei. Sorry but... We’re standing before the Hidden Boss. Could you come and help real quick?”

‘Speak of the Devil...’

“Why? Do you think it’s going to be hard to beat?”

“No, it’s... there are too many idiots in my team...”

Sungjin scratched his head. He understood Nada’s desire to minimize risk in a place she was putting her life at stake, but she should be able to defeat the boss of this difficulty.

She was skilled enough to become one of the Final 10 in the past after all. Sungjin told her

“Even so, you should be more than capable of killing the boss yourself. You even have the bonus I gave you.”

“Hmm... Is that so?”

“Yes. In the fight... there is a Commander, and he sometimes issues the command ‘Shield Wall’. Have the Zombies attack the shields. Then the enemy will counterattack. Use that opening to attack, along with the hunters. Also, it might ‘Charge’. Just have everyone spread out if you hear that. You should be fine with this.”

Nada who was listening to his explanation then looked at him in the eye as she said

“Hmm... So you aren’t coming? It’s good to be on the safe side, no?”

“I have something I have to do over here. Go ahead and attempt

the boss first. And if you really feel like you can't manage, then call me. I'll go at that time."

"Oh really? Ok. Then I'll try to fight it for 10 minutes and call you if I need help."

It is possible to reattempt a summon 10 minutes after it is rejected. She must have felt that this fight would be quite a struggle.

"Ok. Try to do it yourself first."

"Ok."

"Reject request."

Sungjin rejected two requests for summons in a row.

'Haa... I'm busy too...'

He had told them to 'Call when you need me', but he also did not want for the 'Chosen Ones' to rely on him too much either. He wasn't done Troll Hunting yet. Then suddenly, Cain who was sitting next to him got up and gave a short bark.

"Woof"

Sungjin looked at him.

"Hmm? What is it, Cain?"

Cain's ears were raised. Soon after,

"Awooo~"

Even Sungjin's could hear the howling of the wolves from afar.

"Awo awoo~"

"Awoo~"

The howling continued. Cain looked at Sungjin and gave another short bark.

"Woof."

"Ok, lead the way, Cain"

Sungjin commanded. But Cain walked up to him and sat down before Sungjin.

“What, you want me to ride you?”

“Woof”

Sungjin awkwardly did as Cain wanted and sat on his back. He couldn't have imagined that one day he would be sitting on top of Cain who was originally only as tall as his knee, but now that he looked at the wolf, it certainly looked large enough to ride.

Once Sungjin got on his back, Cain ran like the wind through the howling blizzard into the Frostplains.

“Go away! Bastards!”

Human voices

“Woof woof!”

He could hear the wolves as well. Hearing this, Cain ran even faster. In the distance

“Fire Ring!”

Someone had cast a spell. Sungjin spotted the person through Ghost Vision. Not because of the spell, but because his entire body was glowing red.

“Cain, that guy”

Sungjin took out the ‘Master’s Bell’ and rang it twice.

“Ring Ring”

Then Cain, who was already running at breakneck speed, shot forward like a bullet. Sungjin who was holding onto Cain’s shoulder hopped off at the appropriate timing and landed on the snow after a somersault in the air. But,

“Ahh!”

He heard someone cry out in pain. When Sungjin turned to look, Cain and his comrades were ripping the man to pieces. All of them

were moving at an accelerated rate. Sungjin stared at his bell.

‘Wait... this affects summons of the summon as well’

The unnamed troll disappeared leaving behind two items. Sungjin had slain the troll without moving a finger.

“Good job Cain.”

“Woof.”

Sungjin picked up the Troll’s item and took a look around.

‘Are there no more trolls? Or... survivors?’

If there were more trolls, he needed to hunt them. If there were any survivors, he could do as he did at the Dragon’s lair and offer to kill the boss for them. Although he couldn’t flat out request the white coin, he could say

‘I am a Helper’

and most of the people facing imminent death before the timeout would gladly give him anything he asked for.

“Cain, is there any other...”

But then, the Cube gave yet another summon request.

[The Chosen One requested your teleportation. Will you accept the request?]

Sungjin frowned. A rejected summon cannot be reattempted until 10 minutes had passed. In other words, the person requesting the teleportation was none other than Franz. And Franz was the type of person who was stubborn and would not easily ask for help.

‘I thought I could believe in you...’

Sungjin checked the image coming from the Cube.

“Mr Kei! Here...”

But Franz couldn’t continue to speak.

“Lightning Bolt!”

The blinding light from the lightning whited out the screen. Sungjin blinked when he saw that.

‘What’s going on?’

Franz did not show up on the screen anymore.

“Clang Clang!”

He could only hear the sounds of blades colliding. Sungjin thought for a moment. There was no boss or hidden boss who used lightning magic in this round.

‘In other words... a troll?’

Sungjin was torn as to what he should do.

‘But I still don’t know if anyone’s left in this realm or not...’

But then he saw the reddened troll run past the screen. He saw a man with an axe and a shield from profile view. Upon seeing the person Sungjin felt a chill shoot down his spine.

“Illich!”

But there was no time to be surprised. If he was really Illich, then the ‘Chosen One’ might die. Sungjin shouted at the Cube

“Move... I mean Summon. I mean I’ll go, whatever! Just send me now!”

Chapter 132 – Kariharan Frostplains (11)

A bright pillar of light came down from above. Sungjin couldn't help but bounce his leg in impatience as he waited. Normally he would be calm as he obediently awaited the teleportation. But seeing a glimpse of Illich's face pass by from the Cube filled him with a sense of urgency.

‘Did I really see Illich? If he truly is the enemy...’

Even Franz who had the buff from ‘Chosen One’ would have a difficult time. It was because Illich was a man with might of steel and flawless judgement; a near perfect hunter.

Sungjin pressured the innocent Cube

“Hurry hurry, send me!”

Of course, it made no difference as to the speed of which Sungjin was teleported to the new dimension where Franz awaited. Once he arrived in the Frostplains, Sungjin quickly examined his surroundings.

Franz was lying down in the snow, and Illich stood over him as he held an axe over his head. A moment of great peril. Sungjin quickly fired the sword from his right hand.

“Pa!”

Illich who was about to bring his axe down sensed the sword flying in his direction and jumped back. Sungjin who had successfully thwarted the attack,

“Haa” retrieved the sword. Illich gazed at the direction the sword had come from, and the two men locked their eyes together. Sungjin bit his lower lip.

‘It really is... Illich.’

The surprising fact was Illich's title. He was using the title Sungjin had just obtained today. Illich asked Sungjin

“...Who... are you?”

The red aura surrounding his body indicated that he was in a troll state. But Franz also had the same aura. It was not likely that Franz who despised trolls would attack Illich to steal his contribution.

‘I don’t know what’s going on but...’

Sungjin trusted Franz more. Sungjin prepared his weapons and charged towards Illich to save Franz.

Franz was the first hunter he had used the ‘Holy Water of Baptism’. He did not wish to lose him here like this.

Illich did not understand what was going on but took up defensive stance for now. Sungjin recalled the past.

‘Sungjin, you take the rear. You can handle it, right? And once you’re freed up, come back to the front and help Nada as well.’

He was a cold man, but he wasn’t someone who caused other people problems. For now, Sungjin only wanted to push Illich away from Franz, so he swung his sword as a threat rather than to kill.

‘Clang Clang’

He swung twice, and it was enough to fulfill his goal. Once Illich realized Sungjin’s speed, he had to back off while raising his shield.

Meanwhile, Sungjin approached Franz. He was bleeding from the many cuts on him, but it was not life threatening.

“What happened here?”

“That guy... killed the others... so I challenged him and...”

Sungjin stared at Franz. If anything was good about him, it was his honesty. An honesty which bordered on naivete.

“I have no excuses. I thought I could win... so I was late in requesting help, Kei.”

He bit his lips and frowned as if it hurt his pride. Although he had lost, Sungjin liked the man even more.

The people he wished to pick weren't hunters who were strong like steel, but honest men like him. Sungjin turned to face Illich.

“No, it's fine. That man...”

Meanwhile, Illich was using his Frozen Heart title

“Operator, show me the stats of that Adjudicator.”

He was looking at Sungjin's stats without permission. Illich was not often surprised, but once he saw the numbers, his eyes grew wide before coming back to normal.

“Just how...”

Sungjin stood back up and left Franz alone on the ground. Illich was looking back and forth between Sungjin and Franz. He must have been piecing the puzzle together.

Sungjin narrowed his eyes and prepared his sword. But then Illich covered himself with his mantle and said

“Shadow Walk”

And disappeared from sight. It was an invisibility item. Sungjin tensed up for a moment. A surprise attack could come flying at him at any time. But Besgoro said to him

‘Kei, it's a field of snow. Look for footprints.’

And as he suggested, Sungjin lowered his gaze. Besgoro's Ghost Vision allowed Sungjin to see the surrounding area and the prints very clearly.

‘...What is he trying to do?’

Sungjin remained on guard for any sneak attacks as he walked towards where Illich had stood earlier.

‘He was here just now...’

He paid attention to the footprints in the snow. The footsteps

were all over the place due to the fight earlier, but Sungjin was able to distinguish everyone's steps in time.

‘These are mine... this is Franz moving backwards... and Illich's is...’

He saw that Illich's footsteps changed directions and led away from him. And it continued into the distance. Sungjin soon realized

“He ran away!”

Illich was an intelligent man. Once he saw Sungjin's stats through the Frozen Heart, he must have determined that he could not win.

Sungjin chased after the footsteps. While running, all sorts of thoughts came to his mind.

‘I can't believe Illich was actually a troll. I had believed in him as a trustworthy ally... so this is how he became so strong?’

He had thought of the possibility that Illich might have relied on trolling to get stronger, but seeing the proof disappointed him to no end. Sungjin resolved himself. He was a little hesitant because he was facing his old comrade, but if this method is what Illich had used to get to the final 10, then how much had he sinned until then?

‘In fact, I cannot forgive him.’

Sungjin gripped his two swords and ran after the footsteps. After a minute, Illich's footsteps suddenly stopped.

‘What is this?’

“Uryah!”

Illich appeared in midair and came swinging his axe. Sungjin quickly raised his left hand with Artemio to block the strike. Illich who failed his ambush backed off a step.

He charged at Sungjin and swung his axe again. The man was fast

but straightforward; rather than relying on fancy and complex skills, he strove to find the most effective and efficient ways to defeat his enemy.

But that was the worst way to fight Sungjin because it meant he was engaged in a pure contest of stats.

“Clang!”

Sungjin used the Blood Vengeance to block the axe and used his strength to push Illich away. Then he used Artemio to attack him.

‘Clang!’

But still, Illich’s attack was worthy of a man who reached the final 10. Unlike the other trolls, he was able to block Sungjin’s strike at least once. Illich who was unsuccessful with his sneak attack tried to use magic to escape the situation.

“Push away my enemies! Gust!”

But such tricks did not work on Sungjin.

“Absorb Magic”

Artemio let out purple light as it absorbed the spell. Sungjin charged towards Illich right away. Once Illich’s spell was blocked, he raised his shield hastily to defend.

“Bang!”

Sungjin’s sword and his shield clashed, forming sparks. Sungjin gazed at the shield. The shield was decorated with a lion-shaped insignia and looked familiar.

“This was the shield he was...’

It was the item he had brought to the last raid. It meant it was an unbelievably good item. And seeing that it was fine after taking a direct hit from the Blood Vengeance gave proof of its exceptional quality. It was a Legendary class item at the minimum.

It wouldn’t have withstood his attack if it was a heroic tier item

or below. It would have split in half and fallen apart. An axe was swung as a follow-up strike. But there was something strange about the axe. A blue afterimage escaped the axe and froze Sungjin's hand. Sungjin backed off with his hand behind him.

‘So Franz didn't lose to him without reason. I cannot forgive this man.’

Sungjin raised his sword and muttered

“Goat's fire.”

Of the four animals depicted in the ring in his hand, Chimerao, the eyes of the goat began to glow. Once he became immune to cold effects, Sungjin swung both Blood Vengeance and Artemio at the same time. He borrowed the power of the Ring of the Siamese Twins to swing both swords freely. But Illich continued to block his unusual attacks.

‘Clang clang bang clack!’

The fact that he could block Sungjin's attacks despite the immense difference in stats meant that he was able to predict Sungjin's attacks by watching his motions and both swords at the same time. It was an impressive display of skill. Almost none of the other hunters would be able to pull off a similar feat. But he was only strong when compared to other hunters.

“Ha!”

Once Sungjin began to attack in earnest, he became pressured to defend properly. Sometimes he was slightly too slow in reading the direction of the attack and took on a small cut. Sungjin added one more skill into the mix.

“Frenzy”

His swords began to move even faster. Illich who was accumulating cuts then had his axe knocked out of his hand.

“Clang!”

He tried to jump up and grab the axe, but Sungjin pointed Artemio and said

“Expel”

He used the previously absorbed ‘Gust’ to fling the axe far away. The fight was over, Sungjin thought.

‘So... no matter how strong he is, this is his limit.’

If he had to fight Illich before the regression, he would have had to put his life on the line and use everything he had to survive. But now even if he put aside all of his big guns (Ring of the Great Sage, Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Cain, Soldamyr, etc.) he could still win without much difficulty.

Sungjin approached him with his sword drawn. But then the man prostrated and said,

“I’ve lost.”

He was a man of cold and accurate judgement. He must have known that Sungjin was someone he could not defeat in single combat.

So he had run away with an invisibility item and launched a sneak attack from the dark. And once he saw Artemio’s special effect, he completely gave up trying to fight at all. Sungjin gazed down upon him and said

“Such a disappointment, Illich.”

Illich raised his head.

“...My name... how...”

Despite looking up at him from a lower position, his eyes were sparkling. His eyes were always good. His eyes saw through everything, allowing him to make sound judgement.

But no matter how intelligent he was, it was impossible for him to know that Sungjin had fought alongside him for several chapters before Regressing.

Especially since the more intelligent he was, the more he would be unable to predict things far from common sense. During discussion before the beginning of the raids, he was often found saying

‘That’s an exceptional case. First, do as I say.’

By exceptional, it means the probability of something happening was low, all things considered. Something that would be rare to witness. Illich asked Sungjin from a prone position.

“You... what are you?”

Sungjin raised his sword and answered

“I am an exceptional case, Illich.”

Chapter 133 – Kariharan Frostplains (12)

Sungjin walked up to Illich with his swords at the ready. But then Illich raised his hands and said “Hey, listen to me for a moment.”

Sungjin stayed his hands.

‘...The least I can do is listen to his last words.’

“I don’t know where you came from or what is it that you do... but why are you trying to kill me?”

Sungjin gave a short reply.

“Because you are a troll.”

“Wait, then why do you attack only me and leave the swordsman alone?”

Sungjin shut his mouth at his question. Chosen One and Chooser. He couldn’t reveal everything to him. He did not mean to tell him anything. But then Illich said, “Is it because that swordsman is a ‘Chosen One’? Then are you the ‘Chooser’? The ‘Chosen One’ bonus stats are exactly 20% of yours. Am I wrong?”

‘...As intelligent as always.’

He was able to deduce Sungjin’s relationship with just the stats. Seeing Sungjin remain quiet, Illich continued to speak.

“Hey, I think you’re misunderstanding something. I was attacking back because that other guy attacked me first. Didn’t you see the red aura around that guy? I was just protecting myself.”

Sungjin couldn’t help but grin. He had never seen Illich show such pathetic side before.

‘Not even Illich can do anything in the face of absolute power.’

“That man does not randomly attack others. If he attacked you, you must have done something to provoke him.”

Illich then strongly asserted himself as he said

“That swordsman is too emotional. He was overcome with grief when the comrades died, and tried to blame me for their death. That’s when he attacked me. What was I to do? I am participating in the raid and just trying to survive, but he attacked me. It was all self-defense. Really.”

Sungjin stared at him for a moment. He didn’t know exactly what method he had used, but it was very likely that he intentionally provoked Franz to initiate the fight. But ‘That swordsman is too emotional.’

He was not wrong about this either. Franz had also attacked Sungjin before for going ahead alone. It was good that Franz had a strong sense of righteousness, but he was sometimes too narrow-minded.

‘Hmm, should I at least speak with him before I kill him?’

Sungjin thought, so he decided to ask

“If you were so justified, why did you run when you saw me?”

“What else can I do when someone stronger than me comes attacking me? I could only run.”

“Then you ambushed me.”

“You were faster than me. And tracking someone through the snowfield is very easy. So I thought it was the only way I could live. I was putting up one final desperate struggle for survival. And even then, I was planning on only making one or two strikes before running off again.”

‘He still speaks very convincingly.’

He was once an officer in the military. It would be difficult to ascertain the truth from just speaking with him. Sungjin thought to use the Eye of Jeremiah. No matter how much one trains, it would be impossible to circumvent the effects of this item completely. Sungjin touched the item as he asked, “So are you saying you have never trolled before?”

“Of course. I’ve only done it once or twice. That Swordsman is too strong. I had no choice but to put my life on the line to defeat him.”

Sungjin waited for his surface thoughts to reach him. But instead of his thoughts, [Eye of Jeremiah. Cooldown 5 minutes and 7 seconds remaining.]

The Operator had given him an announcement.

‘Oh...right.’

He had used the Eye already when speaking with Baltren.

‘You passed.’

He had traveled to another dimension since then, but not even 5 minutes had passed yet. Sungjin stared at Illich from above.

‘Should I give him 5 minutes?’

But that would take too long. This cunning man may attempt something meanwhile. Sungjin considered his options.

‘What should I do? Off with his head as usual? Or wait and listen to his inner thoughts?’

Meanwhile, Illich strongly continued to make a case for himself.

“Go ask that swordsman why he attacked me. I’m curious as well.”

Sungjin glanced towards where Franz lay in the distance. If Sungjin were to bring him into the conversation, the truth could be revealed relatively easily. But perhaps due to injury, Franz had not gotten up from where he fell in the distance.

In other words, he might be bluffing knowing that Franz would be unable to make a case for himself. But while Sungjin was thinking things over, he came to a sudden realization.

‘The ‘Chosen One’ bonus stats are exactly 20% of yours.’

‘That’s when he attacked me. What was I to do?’

Finally, Sungjin looked up at the man's title. 'Frozen Heart.' He had neglected to consider Illich's title because he already knew who Illich was. The fact that Illich decided to equip this title over a combat title was the most definitive proof he needed.

"...Now that I think of it, not only were you able to see my stats, but you knew Franz's stats as well."

"Ah...that is true."

"Me aside, how did you know his stats? If he suddenly attacked you, when did you have the time to check his numbers?"

"Ah, thats...a habit of mine. I always check to see the other hunter's stats before we start. I need to know the particularities of my allies to come up with a battle plan."

This was where Sungjin noticed that something was wrong.

"But you could just ask them for that."

"Well it's complicated, and I can't ask them for every little thing..."

Sungjin decided to put a question here to bait him.

"So, how are you able to check other people's stats?"

And to this, Illich finally hit rock bottom.

"My hidden title...'s active skill. It allows me to check the stat of the hunter I designate."

And he was smart enough to lie about which of the titles gave him that power, blaming a hidden title instead. If he had made an excuse about an item that allows him to see others' stats, then Sungjin would have been able to ask him to open the status page to see. But unfortunately for him, Sungjin had just obtained a 'Frozen Heart' title in this raid.

'No matter how smart someone is... they can only be as smart as the information they have access to allows them to be.'

Sungjin brought his sword to Illich's neck.

“So you checked your targets before committing trolling.”

“Wha...what? I told you it wasn't for the sake of trolling. I was just thinking about the team...”

Sungjin swung his sword without another word.

‘Clang!’

Illich barely raised his shield in time to block it. But Sungjin moved Artemio almost at the same time and cut off his hand.

“Ahh!”

The shield along with his arm fell to the ground. Sungjin addressed the man who was screaming in agony.

“Sorry, but I hate people who are different from how they are on the inside the most.”

Once his hand was cut off, he finally became a bit more honest.

“You... I don't know what you are... but that guy...! Pick me instead of that guy! I am really strong. You saw, right? I beat that guy who had an incredible amount of stat bonus. Just think about it. If you give me that bonus, I can be a huge asset for you.”

Sungjin bit his lip for a moment. He knew better than anyone just how strong Illich was. That was why it was such a shame. If only he had been a good person, he would have made the most dependable ally.

But he was not that kind of man. Sungjin let his gaze drop as he sadly shook his head.

“Sorry...but no matter how strong you are, I cannot accept anyone who will bring harm to the team.”

At that moment, Illich jumped up like a spring and came charging towards Sungjin, taking out a dagger he had hidden somewhere.

‘Stab’

The sound of a blade piercing the flesh reverberated throughout the Frostplains. Sungjin looked down. Before Illich’s dagger could pierce his heart, a two-handed sword had flown in from the left and had pierced through Illich’s side. The owner of the two-handed sword was none other than Franz.

‘Bzzzzt’

The electrical current coming out of the blade was burning Illich alive. Sungjin watched for a moment before swinging his Blood Vengeance.

‘Pa’

He beheaded Illich and then apologized to Franz.

“Sorry, I know you wanted revenge, but if I kill him, I can get two items.”

The items emerged from Illich’s body and fell to the ground. Franz stepped back and lowered his head.

“No, I am very grateful to you for even coming to help.”

“I’m happy to do so.”

Sungjin checked the items laying in the snow. It was the shield and mantle he had used. It was likely very valuable if he had decided to use it.

‘Unexpected meeting, unexpected rewards.’

Sungjin thought as he collected the items and placed them into the cube. Franz came up to him to apologize.

“I am very sorry. I should have won...I couldn’t beat a single troll...”

Sungjin wanted to say to him

‘It’s okay. He was no ordinary troll’

But instead, he just patted him twice on the shoulders. Sungjin

noticed that Franz's body was glowing red. He was in a Troll state. Sungjin said to him "Hey Franz"

"Yes?"

"You are an important person, you know that don't you?"

"Eh? What do you..."

Franz's face became red as he blushed. Sungjin grinned and continued to say "You are the one and only troll I will not kill in all of the raids. Be thankful."

"Ah... yes, thank you Kei."

"Don't stay here, and go hunt some more before you go back. You have monopoly this round. Get as much as you can get."

"Understood, Mr Kei."

So Sungjin and Franz spent the remaining time roaming the Frostplains to hunt the monsters left. Because Sungjin was unable to receive any contribution from the other dimensions, everything they killed was attributed to Franz only.

[Raid 100% Complete]

[Congratulations! You have obtained a Legendary item...]

Franz received massive rewards befitting someone who was the sole recipient of everything there was to obtain in the chapter.

[Last but not the least, you will be awarded titles you've earned on this raid.]

[Adjudicator – When killing Party members who entered the 'Troll' state, obtain two of their equipped items]

"Ooh..."

The item he had always wanted, the 'Adjudicator' was finally awarded here.

"Finally..."

Sungjin said to Franz who was looking very satisfied, “Then let’s see each other tomorrow morning. Go to bed early, since the number of Chosen One increased by one. You will need to greet him.”

“Ah... understood, Kei.”

The Operator soon gave a countdown

[Returning to the Hunter’s Hall. 10, 9, 8, 7...1, 0]

Franz and Sungjin were teleported simultaneously. To the Hunter’s Hall.

*

In a building with infinite columns known as the Hunter’s Hall, the place that was filled with people as far as the eyes could see was now considerably thinned out. The hunters saw a familiar face of the Operator appear from between the pillars.

[Congratulations. The hunters gathered here have successfully cleared Eleven Chapters.]

[Of the 7,310,067,613 participants of the Chapter 1 Raid]

[The current number of hunters is now 103,655.]

[Everyone here is now a part of the top 0.0014th percentile]

[And have proven your worth through your strength.]

“What... so few left?”

“I think many people died during the Dragon Raid...”

“I think lots of people froze to death this round as well.”

While watching the others gossip like this, Sungjin thought to himself ‘It won’t be long now... when this hall is filled with just the final 10 hunters.’

Chapter 134 – Black Market Eleventh Shopping

Back in the Black Market. Sungjin first removed the thick Snow Suit. The Black Market had a comfortable temperature, ranging from 25 to about 27 degrees Celsius. Keeping the Snow Suit would only lead to sweating profusely.

He left the discarded coat where he stood. The Black Market existed to serve a single person at a time. Even if he left articles of clothing like that out in the street, it would reappear hung in the closet.

It was really convenient. Sungjin sometimes wished that the Black Market existed in reality as well, since every restaurant, shop owner, waiters and inns existed to serve only ‘me’.

‘Hmm... Should I try a different place rather than First Drop?’

Sungjin decided to head to someplace else for today. He wanted to eat a warm soup of some kind. So he walked through the market until he found a noodle shop.

‘I guess I’ll have something here before I go.’

[This place is called ‘Noodle Friends’ run by Shinu Ban.]

[Large variety of noodle dishes are served here.]

“Quack Quack, welcome Mr Hunter.”

The shop owner was a Duck Demihuman with a yellow bill.

“One bowl of Udon, please. Lots of tempura.”

“Ok~ Got it. Quack Quack.”

After ordering Udon, Sungjin addressed the Cube.

“Operator, show me what I got last raid. From trolls and from Raid Reward.”

As soon as he asked, a mountain of items came spilling out of the Cube.

‘Let’s see...’

Sungjin picked out only the Raid Reward items and placed them on top of the table. He had received a glove and a bow, both of which were Legendary Class.

Sungjin first picked up the bow. The handle of the bow was modified and looked magnificent to behold. The elegant curve of the bow sparkled brilliantly in the light.

Ashetaut – Bow of the Frost Archer

Legendary Bow

Strength SS Dexterity A

Passive Skill

Frostshot(IV) – Targets hit by arrow receive 4% penalty to movement and attack speed. Maximum 20 stacks. Target recovers speed over time.

Active Skill

Volley(III) – Two additional arrows fly after the first arrow with the same direction and speed. Applies Frostshot.

Bow of the Queen of Yodelprell

It is said that the number of arrows she has fired to unify her country surpassed tens of thousands.

‘Hmm...’

To be fair, Sungjin was not good at making a judgement on the quality of a bow. He had never used it.

‘Should I auction it? For how much...?’

Trying to estimate the cost of an unfamiliar item would be less than optimal. But now that he thought of it, if Serin wanted the bow, it would be better to give the bow to her than hand it to a

complete stranger through the auction.

He didn't know if she obtained one this round, but the items could be combined so it should prove to be useful. If possible, it would be best if the 'Chosen Ones' could help one another.

'And if there is anything she has that I would like, I could buy it as well.'

Sungjin checked the next item on the list. The item was a blue gauntlet. It was slightly transparent, like a beached jellyfish.

'What an interesting design.'

Tonge – Frozen Gauntlet

Legendary Gauntlet

Strength SS Dexterity B

Passive Skill

Icicle Punch(III) – Each punch against a target imbues frost damage for bonus damage.

Active Skill

Icy Zone(V) – turn a 10 meter radius area into a frozen field. Any enemy caught in the zone would increasingly become slowed until they were frozen solid.

Gauntlet of the legendary martial artist Beocuan A man whose past is shrouded in mystery conquered the martial arts world with this Gauntlet.

'So this is for a martial artist.'

Another item unsuitable for himself. This item was deceptively a weapon meant for unarmed fighters. He didn't even have anyone around to give it to.

'...Mahadas... is he still alive?'

Sungjin took a moment to reminisce about the ex-pro Tae Kwan Do Monk.

‘I would like for him to have survived...’

He was definitely a great man. He was even more trustworthy and dependable than Franz, Nada, or Serin; an ideal candidate for a teammate. He was good to the point where he would occasionally accept harm onto himself to help others.

The fight against Illich reminded him of this fact: the quality of the person’s nature was more important than the skill they possessed. No matter how strong they were, a traitor was a danger to the team. Since Illich was so strong, the number of people who were killed amidst his trolling must amount to a significant number.

‘Illich...’

Remembering the man he just beheaded made Sungjin feel a little down. It was then he noticed the Items Illich had dropped upon his death. The Shield and mantle Illich had used. Sungjin picked them up.

He didn’t know about other times, but these two deserved a closer inspection. Especially the Shield with the Lion Regalia. Judging from the fact that this was the Shield Illich had carried with him to the final Raid gave proof of its worth. It was an Item on par with Sungjin’s Blood Vengeance.

Tetracard – Enraged Lion

Unique Legendary Shield Defense 97%

Active Skill

Merciless (IV) – Increase attack speed by 40%. 5 Second duration. 10 Minute Cooldown.

Shield of God (V) – Become immune to all Magic Attacks. 10 Second Duration. Cooldown 1 day.

Oh father thy art in heaven, if there is any love in your heart Give me strength, that I may defend the weak.

“Whoa... Unique Legendary?”

Illich must have put all of the Enhancement Stones he earned until now into the Shield. The effects were undoubtedly good. No, it was immensely good. To start with, 97% defense rating.

This means that any attack blocked by the Shield deals 3% of the total damage. Good shields sometimes had rating of 80% or higher, but 97% was unusually high.

Followed by the Merciless skill. It was a very good skill. It had lower active duration compared to Zealot or Berzerk mode, but it had no side effects. It was very effective for when the tanks wanted to assist with damage dealing.

Finally, the highlight was the ‘Shield of God’. 10 second immunity to magic. Sungjin had occasionally seen Illich cast ‘Shield of God’

But he did not know the extent of its effects.

‘I didn’t get to see it this time because I didn’t use magic...but it would have sure been surprising to see it used against me.’

Even spells empowered by the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ were just another spell. So even spells empowered by the ring would be nullified by the effect of the Shield; this would undoubtedly cause Sungjin to be greatly shocked. Sungjin held up the Shield for a moment.

The area above the Lion’s eye had a small scratch, making it look even angrier than it was by design.

‘So... is this why it’s called Enraged Lion?’

But unfortunately, Sungjin was unable to utilize this item. Going from Dual Wield to sword and shield would lower his overall damage output. Although the 10 second immunity was tempting, Sungjin would be unable to use this item.

‘That being said... I can’t even put this up for Auction...’

To begin with, Unique Legendary items were priceless. Even if a price was tacked on, it would be so expensive that the buyer would have to forgo spending any coins for 2 or more chapters. Meaning, there was no one who could possibly afford it.

‘It’s better to hand this off to someone I know at a discount instead...’

Shield user, someone he knows, sell at a discount, these thoughts made Sungjin think of Baltren. Sungjin held onto the shield for a moment longer before returning it to the cube. The last item was the Illich’s Mantle. It was a Black Mantle which reminded Sungjin of ‘Darker than Black’.

Rubin – Membrane of Darkness

Heroic Mantle Defense 21%

Passive Skill

Shadow Ambush(II) – Before the Shadow Walk is over, the next attack deals double damage.

Active Skill

Shadow Walk (IV) – Hide in shadows. Become invisible to others. 40 second Duration ‘Hmm... this might come in handy.’

Sungjin thought. He had felt the need for invisibility on occasions. And he was forced to ask for Soldamyr’s assistance in the past as well.

‘Current one is good... but this one might be worth using.’

Sungjin did not assign a price to this item. He was planning on carrying it around with him and swapping out with Sael’s Breath as needed. Sungjin also returned the item to the Cube for now.

After the four items had been put away, the rest of the mound was items he had obtained from the trolls he had killed; all the items he intended to trade in for coins.

‘Ah... if that’s the case...’

Before Sungjin had a chance to pick one up,

“Odon is ready!”

The Duck Demihuman brought out his menu.

‘Oh well... I’ll resume after a meal.’

Sungjin left the items as they were and picked up the bowl.

“Ahh...”

After drinking the soup directly from the bowl, he picked up his chopsticks.

‘Slurp’

And began to eat the noodle. He felt the cold of the Kariharan Frostplains melt away.

*

“I’ll leave it to you.”

“Yes, Mr. Hunter. Of course.”

Black Market Auction House. After he had finished his business at the Auction House, Sungjin made his way back to the Ninety Nine Nights as he reflected over today’s raid. Many things happened this raid; Fireball empowered by the Ring of the Great Sage, melting the great Frozen Palace, the fight against the Hidden Boss, the Troll hunts, reunion with Baltren, and the most memorable of all, the sight of Illich swinging his axe towards Franz.

‘Franz... if I was even a little bit slower, you wouldn’t have made it out. I was able to barely protect you this time, but...’

Losing even one Chosen One would be a major blow for Sungjin.

‘I’ll have to give them a warning during the meeting tomorrow morning. To call for my help if they think they’ll die. And... make a list of monsters or individuals to avoid.’

But while he was thinking of this, the Operator gave him an

announcement.

[A Chosen One has requested your teleportation.]

‘Hmm?’

Sungjin stared at it and thought

‘It’s probably Baltren.’

But the person turned out to be Franz.

“Mr Kei, how are you? I just wanted to say thank you for saving me today.”

Sungjin tilted his head. Requesting summon should only be possible once a day. He had no idea how Franz could be calling him.

“Hmm? How did you contact me?”

Franz answered

“Ah... You didn’t know?”

Chapter 135 – Black Market Eleventh Shopping (2)

“Know what?”

When Sungjin parroted Franz and tilted his head, Franz replied, “Well... after the Raid, the cooldowns get refreshed, even the ones with 1 day cooldowns. I think that there is a change of date between before and after the Raid.”

“Oh... Really? I did have my suspicions too”

The Duration of the Raid did not match the time difference between when the Hunters were teleported away from the Black Market to when they came back. And whenever he came back, Cain and Rajenta were noticeably larger than before. Sungjin had suspected in the past ‘Did several days... no, months pass?’

He had wondered from time to time, but it appeared to have been true all along. This means that it would be possible to hold a meeting before and after each raid.

“Hmm... Then I should be able to gather everyone up today as well.”

“Yes, I suspect it should be possible.”

“That’s good. I have lots of things to say. Then I guess I’ll call everyone before dinner time? We can all eat together around the table.”

Meeting at the morning was productive, but it would be good if everyone could meet again for dinner. He still had to introduce Baltren to everyone. Franz gave a refreshing reply.

“That sounds good.”

“Then I’ll call you in a bit.”

Franz bowed deeply.

“Yes Sir, Mr Kei.”

Finishing up the conversation, Sungjin headed towards Kargos’s Smithy before heading to the Inn. It was because he wanted to inquire about the mysterious ‘Star of Winter’.

‘Star of Winter...’

He didn’t have a clue as to what the item was for. Sungjin entered the Smithy, holding the star in his hands. Luckily, Kargos recognized it in a single glance.

“Hmm, this is a Gem... A star that shines alone in the night. A gem symbolizing loneliness.”

“Symbolizing loneliness... what does that mean?”

To Sungjin’s question, Kargos raised two of his gloved fingers and responded.

“Listen carefully. There are two ways to use this gem.”

Sungjin nodded.

“Ok.”

“First is simple. Go to Meridian and sell it.”

“... Mmm...”

“Then you can receive few thousand coins since it’s an expensive gem.”

Few thousand coins for a crafting material was not all that attractive an option for Sunjin. He unhesitatingly asked, “And the other method?”

“Craft it into an item.”

“What happens when you craft it?”

“Didn’t I tell you, the gem symbolizes loneliness.”

“What does that mean...”

When Sungjin trailed off his sentence, Kargos finally revealed the

crucial piece of information.

“It becomes an item that allows you to enter the Raid alone.”

Shocked upon hearing the smithy’s words Sungjin exclaimed out of surprise “What?!”

Kargos raised the Star of Winter and said, “If you use this before the Raid starts, you will enter the Raid alone without teammates. Of course, that means you will get 100% of everything you kill, but you need to have the confidence of solo clearing a Raid.”

He was more than confident in soloing the raids. Sungjin was even prepared to solo clear a 10 man raid. With this Item, he could wipe out the mobs without worrying.

“Then what will you choose? Will you go to Meridian and...”

Before Kargos can finish, Sungjin already gave his reply.

“2nd. Please craft it.”

Kargos grinned at Sungjin.

“Ok. I knew you would make that choice. Then go ahead and come by tomorrow morning as always. Crafting fee is a thousand coins.”

It wasn’t even expensive to make either.

“Understood. See you tomorrow then.”

Sungjin bowed his head to say goodbye and returned to Ninety Nine Nights.

*

Once at the table, Sungjin retrieved the Sceptre of the Warlord. He lifted it into the air and declared, “Draft”

The faces of the ‘Chosen Ones’ began to appear above the Cube. First was Franz.

“Franz, it’s time.”

He must have been waiting for Sungjin.

“Understood. I was getting ready.”

Next was Serin.

“Hey Serin, come over. Let’s have dinner together.”

“With everyone? Or alone?”

“Everyone.”

“Ah... Ok Oppa.”

Then Nada.

“Nada, I’m planning on hosting a dinner with everyone here, so come. I want to speak about the Raid as well.”

“Okay”

The three of them arrived at Sungjin’s Inn first. Sungjin first addressed Serin.

“So did you find the Hidden Piece?”

“Yes, Oppa. Once we began to search for it, it was in such an obvious location that it made me speechless.”

“Right?”

Sungjin decided to speak to Nada as well.

“You seem fine. I guess it went well with the Hidden Boss?”

“Yeah. I did as you said and it was quite easy. Well, a lot of my zombies were taken down, but well, there were plenty of corpses around.”

“I thought as much. Have more confidence, Nada.”

Finally, Baltren’s face showed up on the Cube.

“Ah, Master Hunter Kei. What’s going on?”

“I am gathering everyone. Please accept the summon request.”

“Ah, ok.”

Baltren was the last to cross over to where Sungjin was waiting. It was always difficult for a student who transferred in during the middle of the school year to adjust. The first order of business for Sungjin was to introduce Baltren to everyone.

“Here is Baltren. An American and a Police Officer.”

Baltren who was taller than everyone by about a head bowed slightly to introduce himself.

“Name is Gerald Baltren. Nice to meet you all.”

Serin, Nada, and Franz welcomed him warmly.

“Hello.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Welcome.”

Sungjin grasped his shoulder and said,

“We met in Chapter 1 and somehow ran into each other again.”

Serin’s eyes grew wide in surprise.

“Ooh really?”

Nada nodded in agreement.

“What an interesting fate.”

Sungjin clapped once.

“Then let’s be done with this stiff introduction and get down to dinner and sharing stories. Dalupin, order please.”

Dalupin came forward and bowed.

“What shall I prepare for you, dear Hunters?”

“Let’s not order separately and have a large feast. How about it?”

“Sounds good.”

“Ok”

“What country’s cuisine should we pick? Chinese? Italian?

French? Or Korean?”

*

“This is Cowtail Boeuf Bourguignon”

The Chosen Ones partook in French cuisine as they exchanged small talk.

“I was driving around in my patrol car when I was suddenly summoned. It was really surprising.”

“I was running by the Han river when my vision suddenly turned fuzzy, and I found myself somewhere else.”

“I was taking a class in college, and by the time I blinked, the Professor had changed places with a mannequin and the Operator’s Cube.”

They discussed how they first arrived into this place.

“Ey, but Count Dimitri wasn’t all that bad. Wasn’t Harpy Queen so much worse?”

“I vote Count Dimitri.”

“Me too”

They shared their feelings about previous Raids.

“So Mr Kei appeared just like that, and bam! He threw his sword and the Axe-wielding man...”

“Ohh”

They shared stories about how they were saved by Sungjin. The mood in the group was very pleasant.

In the past before the Regression, whether it was due to having met so late in the raids or whether they were under a lot of pressure or fear, the final members only ever discussed about the next Raid. But this group of people quickly got along with each other. Perhaps this was due to their innate personality.

They tended to rely on him, but that was a good thing. Being able

to converse like this could only improve the sense of camaraderie and encourage cooperation. Sungjin who was also enjoying the conversation and laughing along noticed the setting sun and addressed the group.

“Ok, then”

Everyone stopped speaking once Sungjin spoke “Let’s end it here and, hmm. I have a few official statements to make.”

“What is it?”

“First, if you feel even the slightest bit of danger to your life, ignore everything and call me. Don’t feel embarrassed whether it is a troll or a monster, just call me. If the situation seems dire, I’ll drop everything and go. You are all important people to me. I cannot let any of you die.”

Franz lowered his head at Sungjin’s words while the others nodded. He must be reflecting over his actions today.

“Second, prepare for Chapter 14. 12, 13 well... they are just normal 5 man raids so they should pose no difficulty. But Chapter 14 is different. It’s a 10 man raid, and an incredibly powerful boss will appear. It might be difficult for everyone here, despite my bonus stats. Even more so since 10 man raids are largely dependent on the quality of the teammates you end up with. So work hard to get as strong as you can until then.”

Baltren raised his hands.

“How did Mr Kei know that the Chapter 14 will be a 10 man raid?”

Sungjin stared at him for a moment. He was brand new, so he was not aware of the unspoken rule; nobody is allowed to ask ‘how did you know’ to Master Hunter K. Sungjin cleared his throat and said “That’s...”

Baltren’s eyes grew larger. Serin also opened her eyes wide in surprise. But “A secret.”

Baltren checked the others. Everyone else avoided his gaze, and Baltren finally understood the situation.

“Ah... ok.”

“Third, trade items amongst each other. Operator.”

Sungjin called the Cube and took out the items he prepared. He held the Bow and Illich’s Shield.

“These are items I obtained this round... Serin, do you want the bow?”

Serin’s eyes were already round.

“I got one this round already and was planning on using it.”

“Then did you know if you take three more identical items to the smithy you can raise its rarity?”

“Of course. I even bought that sword for Oppa in the past, remember?”

“Ah... right.”

Sungjin scratched the back of his neck.

“Well. Like so, if you get an item you don’t need, speak amongst yourselves and try to trade items to help each other out. Especially for Legendary class, try to trade before you sell it off.”

“Ok.”

This system was actually meant to benefit Sungjin since he was able to obtain over a dozen items per chapter. He would trade these with the Chosen Ones, and they would pay him in coins, and then he would buy and drink elixirs. It was mutually beneficial, and then the Chosen Ones would even get additional bonus stat points as a result of this.

“Fourth...”

Sungjin paused speaking to gesture Dalupin over. Dalupin handed each of the Hunters a piece of paper. On it was descriptions

of several hunters' appearances, their preferred weapons, and their suspected titles.

Edward Blonde Caucasian White Staff Spell Master Ryu Shin
Black haired Brown Skinned Spear God of Spear ...

The list was none other than the descriptions of the previous final 10 members with the exception of Nada, Illich and himself. Sungjin said to the group "If you see any of these people, call me immediately without delay. Understood?"

Chapter 136 – Black Market Eleventh Shopping (3)

“Here we have Cherry Clafoutis and Macarons.”

Desserts were placed on the table by Dalupin once the feast was over. Sungjin enjoyed the sweets with his Chosen Ones. This marked the end of tonight’s meetings.

“Let’s call it a day here. Go rest up and let’s meet tomorrow morning again before the Raid begin.”

“Ok”

“Sure”

“Ah, Serin and Baltren, please remain behind since we still have to trade items.”

“Then I’ll be off.”

“See you tomorrow.”

Franz and Nada returned to their own dimensions first. Sungjin retrieved the Bow made of Ice and Illich’s Shield and placed them on the table. Before Sungjin could open his mouth, Serin already pointed at the bow and asked

“So how much will you charge for it?”

“Hmm... Since it’s legendary, it should be worth roughly ten to fifteen thousand Coins. But with these specs, it should be twelve thousand.”

“Twelve thousand?”

“Yes. is it a bit expensive?”

Serin moved a bit closer and leaned forward, with upturned eyes she blinked as she asked

“Can’t you give me a discount?”

Sungjin gazed at her

‘This girl...’

Women were strange creatures. When he first met her, she had a cold and mature image which he was used to seeing through the TV (It just goes to show that TV is a poor indicator of an individual’s character), but now that they became friendly, she played up her charm, appealing and acting cute. It was like she was a completely different person. Due to her exceptional appearance, Sungjin couldn’t help but be swayed by her.

“Well... I want to sell it to you for cheap as well.”

“Then you should. Why don’t you?”

Sungjin decided to be rational. It would be far more optimal to get as much coin as he could muster and buy Elixirs. And Serin would also benefit greatly from this.

“But I can’t do that. I have places I need to spend the money. I don’t want to play salesman with you, but I need to get stronger so that...”

Sungjin was spouting a flood of excuses when Serin stopped him.

“I got it, Oppa. Actually... I was going to pay whatever price you ask for.”

Sungjin tilted his head.

“Hmm?”

“I know Oppa is doing this and that for everyone. So, I wanted to pitch in and be helpful.”

“Then why did you ask for a discount?”

“I... just wanted to ask. Just to see how you’d react.”

Serin made an indecipherable smile.

“Thanks to the Hidden Piece I just sold, I do have enough Coins to buy it. I’ll buy it now.”

Sungjin was confused at her behavior, but he still completed the trade with her.

“Hmm...ok.”

“Trade Ashetaut Legendary Bow”

“Trade twelve thousand Black Coins.”

“Approve”

“Approve”

The Ashetaut was now the property of Serin. Even though Sungjin was able to touch the bow, he could no longer use it. And even if Serin left the bow behind in his dimension, the weapon would be available to her at any time via her Cube.

“Now that that’s done, where will you get the other two?”

The thought only occurred to him after the fact.

“One I might be able to find on the Auction house. The other, Nada Unni promised to sell me.”

“Nada?”

“Yes. We were speaking earlier, and Nada Unni said she got one this round as well. And since she can’t use the bow...”

“Oh really?”

“Yes. I don’t have enough to buy all three at the same time... so Nada Unni decided to give me the bow now and said that I should repay her back slowly as I earn more Coins.”

The two women must have gotten quite close to each other without Sungjin noticing. And why wonder; in the raids dominated by men, it must have been a big relief to be able to rely on each other.

“That’s good.”

“Yes, I also promised to sell magic related items to her for cheap. As Oppa said, be mutually beneficial to each other.”

“Ok. I’m glad to hear that.”

“Then I’ll be on my way. See you tomorrow morning, Oppa.”

“Yeah.”

Serin retrieved the bow and headed back to her Dimension. The last one remaining was Baltren. On the table was Illich’s Shield.

Baltren should be able to deduce by now that the shield was meant for him. Sungjin first began to speak without moving the shield from the table.

“As you might have noticed from the trade just now... I have brought out this shield to sell. To you, Mr. Baltren.”

Baltren gulped audibly. He must have realized that this Shield was not an ordinary item.

“But I can’t sell this shield so easily.”

“Why is that?”

To his question,

“Operator”

Sungjin instructed the Cube to show Baltren the Shield’s specs. As expected, Baltren’s jaws dropped. Sungjin raised two fingers like a V and said to him

“There are two reasons why I cannot easily sell this item to you. First, it is too expensive. It is difficult to determine a fair price for this item. Judging from the specs alone, it should be worth over fifty thousand coins...”

Sungjin checked his expression. Baltren didn’t look so good. And it was to be expected. Even Sungjin only received twelve thousand coins this round.

A regular hunter without the ability to hunt trolls for coins would have to save up every scrap of coins he earned for over three chapters and sell almost every item he received in order to scrape

together such a large amount.

But this is only true in ‘theory’. Not spending a single coin and having them accumulate in the Cube would drastically increase the chances of dying.

“And that’s realistically impossible, and since you are now a comrade, I’ll just leave it at thirty thousand coins.”

Baltren puckered his lips and nodded. He must have also thought that such an amount might be realistically attainable.

“If it is about thirty thousand, I might be able to manage it in one or two raids. I’ll buy it then.”

Sungjin waved his index finger and said

“Ah, no no. The reason why I can’t easily sell this item is really due to the second reason. If we can overcome this issue, I can hand over the item now, and receive payment in installments.”

“Then what is the other reason?”

“As you can see... this Shield is a Unique Legendary item. I am not sure if you’ve seen it before... but it’s on par with the items that I currently use. The only reason why I am offering this for sale... is because I do not use a shield. If this was a piece of armor or helm, I would have used this myself.”

Baltren nodded. If Besgoro heard him, he would have said,

‘What?!’

And made complaints, but Sungjin already placed him on top of Shadowrun in the stables before the ladies were called over. Sungjin continued to speak.

“This item is too strong. So in order for me to sell this to you, Baltren... I need a higher degree of trust for you.”

“Higher degree?”

“Yes. There is a possibility that you might betray me after taking

the item.”

“No way...”

Baltren made a face as if he couldn't even imagine it. But this was not enough. Edward would have made the same face.

“Baltren...it is true our fates have crossed paths. But... realistically we did not have much chance to interact with one another.”

“I guess... that's true.”

“I know I said you passed last time... but do you mind if I ask you few more questions?”

“Yes. Please ask me anything.”

Sungjin said to him

“Let's speak about family. Do you have a family?”

“I have a mother... and a fiance.”

“What about your father?”

“He left us when I was young. I know his name, but I can barely remember his face.”

“Hmm...”

Sungjin nodded quietly. He himself was an orphan. In comparison, single mother household wasn't all that bad. What was more important was to find out how much he cared about his remaining family.

“What about your mother and fiance? How do you feel about them?”

“First of all... my mother is an amazing woman. She raised me alone and worked as a housemaid all her life. Despite our difficult conditions, she financially supported me until I became a Police Officer. I can't fully express my gratitude.”

“And your fiance?”

“My fiance is the most wonderful person. She loved me despite my difficult background. She was pregnant with my child at the time, but I don’t know what...”

Sungjin touched the Eye of Jeremiah as he asked

“So, did you see them both through the Operator’s broadcast?”

“...Yes.”

But as he replied, his eyes reddened slightly. A strong voice then began to speak.

‘I must save them’

It appeared as though the stronger the emotion, the louder the voice of the mind was through the Eye of Jeremiah. Sungjin took into consideration what he heard in Baltren’s head as he began to direct the conversation.

“Then... you must wish to save them both.”

“Yes.”

Sungjin was waiting for his thoughts, but then Baltren continued to speak.

“I saw my mother from the first chapter... but I didn’t see my fiance until several chapters later, in the hunter’s hall. That means...”

Baltren could not continue his words. He saw her only after several chapters had progressed. It means she survived the initial chapters and died and ended up in purgatory much later on.

“I don’t know how she managed while carrying a child...I wonder if the child is fine...”

Sungjin did not press any further than this. Baltren was already heaving away, crying.

‘I have to do it. I have to finish the raids. If I don’t...’

Sungjin heard loud voices again. Here he made up his mind. In

the case of his former teammates, the two he could most assuredly depend on were Mustafa and Hildebrandt. And both of them had a strong desire to save and protect their families. Sungjin didn't notice, but Dalupin was by his side, offering him a towel. Baltren accepted the towel and wiped his face. Once his emotions settled back down, Sungjin said to him

“I am sorry for testing you, Baltren.”

“No no, I understand your reasons, Kei.”

Sungjin pushed the shield towards Baltren and said

“Take it. It is yours.”

Baltren nodded.

“Of course, it is not free. I'll take ten thousand coins for the next three raids. That should lower your burden considerably, right?”

“Of course.”

Sungjin and Baltren completed their transactions. It was an extremely profitable trade for Baltren. He was able to obtain a Unique Legendary item at a discount and with zero interest installation of payments.

Of course, it was not a bad trade for Sungjin by any means. To begin with, Sungjin's goal from the start was to have 'Strong and reliable 9 comrades'. Investing in the combat ability of people he could trust was the right thing to do.

Sungjin was strong on his own, but he only had two hands. In order to finish the raids, dependable tanks like Baltren were necessary.

“Then let's see each other again tomorrow, Baltren.”

“Ok Kei. Good night.”

Once Baltren was gone, Sungjin briefly walked out of Ninety Nine Nights. Outside, Cain and Rajenta walked up to Sungjin to nudge him. Sungjin looked up into the night sky as he rubbed their fur.

The round moon hung in the sky. He made a promise to himself while looking up at the moon.

‘This time... I won’t fail... Not again.’

Chapter 137 – Black Market Eleventh Shopping (4)

Once all the Chosen Ones returned to their dimensions, Sungjin lay on the bed alone and checked his stats.

“How does my stats look right now?”

Title: Master Hunter

HP: 199100 MP: 275040

Strength: 28486 21912 (+6574)

Dexterity: 29371 22593 (+6778)

Endurance: 19910 15315 (+4595)

Magic Power: 14455 11119 (+3336)

Mind Power: 27504 21157 (+6347)

Unallocated Points: 0

The numbers were too large now. Despite being the owner of these stats, Sungjin had to stare at the screen for a long time before he could decipher what was written there. The status Sungjin was focusing on nowadays was Mind Power.

He was investing much of his points into Mind Power in order to be able to cast a 9th class spell with the Master Hunter title equipped (without putting any more points into Magic Power).

The amount of mana he needed to be able to cast a 9th class spell using the Ring of the Great Sage was 650475. Over six hundred and fifty thousand. Even if Ariane were to provide half the value, he still needed roughly 330,000 mana. Sungjin made quick calculations in his head.

“That means... I still need about 5000 more Mind power.”

Sungjin checked the number of Black Coins he had.

“How many coins do I have left?”

[87670 Coins.]

‘Mmm...’

This was the combined total of the Raid reward, the twelve thousand he got from Serin, and the ten thousand he received from Baltren.

‘I still have to pay five thousand for Trollseeker Marbles, crafting the gem needs another thousand. If I spend eighty-one thousand on elixirs, then I will be able to cast 9th class spell by dawn.’

Sungjin lay down on the bed after finishing the calculations. When he first went to the Spell Shop and found out about the monetary and mana cost of 9th class spells, he had thought it would take a minimum of ten Chapters before he would be able to use them.

But thanks to the Elixirs, Ariane, and Ring of the Great Sage, he was able to cast a 9th class spell much earlier than he had anticipated.

‘If I obtain the power to go back in time...No one can hope to defeat me.’

Filled with inflated expectations, Sungjin fell into a deep slumber.

*

‘Creak, creak creak’

Each step he took on the worn out stairs caused the wooden boards to wail. Sungjin followed the stairs into the darkness, step by step.

“Welcome.”

The Merchant of Darker than Black greeted him as always, sitting in the dark corner in his usual seat. Sungjin walked up to him and said,

“Recharge the Trollseeker Marbles... and I want Eighty thousand coins worth of Elixirs, enough for sixteen thousand points.”

“Wow, how wealthy you have become.”

Sungjin didn't react to the Merchant's exclamation. Seeing that Sungjin didn't respond, the Merchant also cut the small talk. Reaching into his vest, he pulled out a small bottle.

“Here, take it.”

Sungjin was given the small bottle. Although Sungjin had requested five times the amount as last time, it still seemed to contain exactly the same amount of liquid. Sungjin glanced at the Merchant with his eyes full of suspicion. The Merchant took the hint and said to him

“Ah, the amount isn't that important. How should I explain... the physical aspect is there just to give the person the impression of ‘I am currently drinking something’, nothing more. Even if you bought a million coin's worth of Elixirs, I would have given you the same size of bottle.”

‘...How arbitrary.’

Sungjin complained in his mind as he opened the bottle and drank the contents. There was no flavor or scent from the liquid. Sungjin checked his stats right away.

“Operator, how many unallocated points do I have?”

[16000 Points.]

The Elixir worked as promised. Sungjin left the man behind and turned to leave.

“Bye then.”

“Going already?”

The Merchant asked, but Sungjin only glanced back at him, before leaving without another word. He never felt good being around the man. On his way out of Darker than Black, Sungjin

allocated his stat points immediately.

“Operator, add three thousand to Strength Dexterity and Endurance. And for the rest, add seven thousand to Mind Power.”

[Applied.]

“How much Mana do I have now?”

[You have 366040]

Finally, he was ready to use the 9th class spell, Time Reversal.

‘I’ll test it today.’

Sungjin thought as he walked away. Before he headed to the inn, he dropped by Kargos’s Smithy.

“Mr. Kargos, do you have the items?”

“They are ready.”

Sungjin retrieved the items he had left with the Blacksmith.

“I told you yesterday, but cost of production is one thousand Coins.”

A thousand Coins had become chump change to Sungjin.

“Check out.”

Sungjin received the gem. It had always given off a light, but after being properly cut, it now shone brilliantly. Sungjin held the item up.

Lathion – Star of Solitude

Legendary Accessory

Passive Skill

Reward for Training(I) – Receive additional 10% stats upon raid completion.

Active Skill

Solitary Training (I) – Enter the next Raid Alone.

Be like the uncatchable wind, the courageous Lion, the incorruptible Lotus. [Go alone like the Rhino's Horn](#)

There is a phrase in Korea 'Go alone like a Rhino's horn'. This is an interesting choice of words for two reasons. First of all, there is a famous and very successful book that became a movie and plays by that name. It has been sold steadily since 1993, and is known as a 'best steady seller'. Even more interesting is the fact that the phrase was originally found in (and the author has confirmed that the name is based on) the oldest Buddhist scriptures, Nikaya.

I have been personally commissioned to translate a portion of Nikaya into English in the past, and have worked with books dealing with the subject. I have a lot of exposure to the contents and ideas of Nikaya and have read through a large portion of the collective work (Nikaya is a collection of many volumes of books), but I won't delve into it here, since the subject matter is highly Religious and therefore not appropriate for a webnovel website.

The main idea behind the saying is that avoiding becoming dependent on others is a way to avoid suffering because all forms of dependence on an external source will inevitably lead to times when the object of dependence is not available or in shortage. It isn't preaching avoidance, just preaching against emotional reliance. This phrase adds an element of Zen-like mindfulness to this Star's nature; a serene, meditative, and contemplative image.

"Mmm?"

The passive 'Reward for training' caught his eye.

"Kargos, it had this kind of effects as well?"

Kargos answered

"Well... I didn't mention it in case it encourages people to act irrationally and try it out recklessly."

"Ah... I see."

It was all good. The more stats he earns, the more benefit would

be distributed to the Chosen Ones. Kargos continued to say

“For it to work, you have to use it before you get transferred into the Raids. Okay?”

“I understand.”

Sungjin nodded and left the Smithy, returning to the Ninety Nine Nights. Once he had returned to the lot where the Inn was, Cain stood up.

“Ah, no, Cain, go back to sleep.”

Sungjin had said to him, but then he changed his mind and said,

“Hey, Cain... could you try... attacking me?”

“Grr?”

Cain had always obediently executed Sungjin’s commands. But this time, Cain couldn’t understand him. Sungjin used both hands to gesture

“Hey, come and attack me seriously.”

Cain tilted his head one way.

“Woof Woof”

Cain barked twice to show his disapproval. Cain was likely too loyal to be able to carry out this kind of order. Sungjin turned to look at Rajenta. Rajenta was sleeping without a care in the world.

‘...I can’t test it with these guys.’

“Okay, that’s fine. Go back to sleep Cain.”

Sungjin returned to his room on the 2nd floor of Ninety Nine Nights. Then,

“Operator, wake me up in two hours.”

[Alarm set]

After he had arranged the wake-up time, Sungjin laid down on the bed. He closed his eyes, but he didn’t feel all that sleepy.

[It is 6 o'clock 58 minutes 42 seconds.]

Sungjin woke up to the sound of the Operator's alarm. While he was under a stream of water in the bath, he addressed the cube again.

“Operator, get me the Staff of the Warlord.”

The original time for breakfast meeting was 8, but the reason why he decided to wake up an hour earlier was because there was something else he wanted to do beforehand.

“Inspection.”

At his command,

[Please select the target of Inspection.]

Four images of Chosen Ones appeared above the cube.

‘Pew’

Serin was practicing her bow against a bale of hay by the stables first thing in the morning.

‘Huu’

Baltren was drinking coffee as he was focused on reading through the information sheet (since he didn't know that Sungjin's briefing rendered such information obsolete).

‘Mmph’

Nada was stretching in her bedroom. But her clothing was extremely thin, like the training suit worn by athletes.

‘Ooh, nice!’

Besgoro who had been quiet recently suddenly blurted out in excitement.

‘Dat ass’

Sungjin ignored him and turned away. Franz was still in bed. Sungjin pointed to that image.

“Send me there.”

[Request for Teleportation accepted. 10, 9...]

‘Hey, if you’re going to use this anyway, let’s try a bit earlier. Or slightly later. We might get a glimpse of something nice!’

Sungjin teleported to Franz’s bedroom while listening to Besgoro’s suggestions. Franz continued to sleep, oblivious to the fact that Sungjin had arrived. Sungjin shook him awake.

“Hey, Franz.”

Franz was startled awake.

“Ahh! What?!”

His reaction was natural, seeing as Ninety Nine Nights were reserved for a single hunter only; the fact that a hunter would come to wake him up was something he couldn’t anticipate. He stopped groping for the sword he kept close and addressed the man who had woken him up.

“Ah... Mr. Kei.”

He had thought he had accidentally overslept. He glanced around the room.

“Is it already time for the briefing?”

Sungjin replied,

“No, there is still an hour left before the briefing. I just wanted to ask you for a favor, so I came an hour early.”

“A request?”

“Yes.”

“What...”

Sungjin grasped Franz’s shoulder and said,

“Go wash up and meet me in the courtyard. Let’s spar.”

“Spar?”

Franz's eyes widened in surprise.

“Yes, spar.”

He soon nodded his head.

“Ok, I understand.”

Sungjin left the bedroom and returned to the lobby. There was a Dalupin in this dimension, identical to the one in his own. He approached Sungjin and asked,

“Mr. Hunter, should I prepare breakfast?”

“No, not yet. I am going to have breakfast later. For now... please get me a glass of apple juice.”

“Understood. Right away.”

Dalupin entered the kitchen. Meanwhile, Sungjin took Soldamyr's lamp off of his belt and rubbed it. The genie soon emerged.

“Have you called for me, master? It is still early morning. What did you require of me?”

“Mmm I am finally capable of casting 9th level Magic... so I wanted to show you.”

“Ohh... finally...”

Soldamyr looked happier than Sungjin was at the news. He had spent his whole life researching time reversal magic. Being able to see it first hand must have overjoyed him.

“The Juice is ready.”

Dalupin brought a delicate color of apple juice to Sungjin. The drink had minute pulp floating about as if it had been freshly squeezed just now. Sungjin took a sip and waited for Franz to climb down the stairs. Franz who was fully armed for combat came down to the 1st floor lobby.

“Let us go, Mr. Kei.”

Sungjin headed into the courtyard with him.

‘Sssling’

Franz pulled his two-handed sword out of the scabbard. Sungjin checked his own fingers. The Ring of the Great Sage was shining as it always had on his finger. Sungjin pulled out the Magic Sword Ariane. Franz said, full of emotion,

“A spar with Mr. Kei. I feel even more nervous than when facing a Hidden Boss.”

Sungjin grinned. This wasn’t truly a sparring match, but an experiment. However, Sungjin had no intentions to correct him and wanted to let him believe what he wanted to believe. Sungjin said to him

“Come at me with everything you’ve got, Franz.”

Chapter 138 – Black Market Eleventh Shopping (5)

Franz was full of enthusiasm. While holding his sword in his hands, he slowly inhaled and exhaled.

“Hooooo...”

It appeared to be his method of preparing himself. Sungjin swung Blood Vengeance and Ariane through the air by rotating his wrists

Swoosh~ Swoosh

And said,

“Hey, Franz if we just spar it’ll be boring, so how about having a small wager? If you can hit me even once with your sword then I’ll...”

Yesterday, after buying the elixir he had about a thousand Black Coins left.

“Give you a thousand Black Coins.”

“And if I can’t hit you?”

“Then you have to give me a thousand.”

Franz pressed his lips into a thin line and spoke.

“Hrm... That seems rather unfavorable...”

“Then I won’t use any item active skills.”

“Even with that, it’s a bit...”

Sungjin placed Blood Vengeance back in its scabbard and said,

“Then how about this? I’ll only use one sword.”

Finally, Franz nodded his head.

“... Ok, that’s fine.”

“Alright.”

Franz raised his sword and said,

“Then, I’m coming.”

He wore a serious expression.

“Come whenever,” replied Sungjin as he looked at him.

‘He has no chance if I fight seriously... But if I do that then I won’t be able to take full advantage of Time Reversal... I’ll use the spell after fighting for a while.’

While Sungjin was thinking this,

“Hwaaaap!”

Franz yelled as he charged towards him. Franz had definitely become much faster than when they had first exchanged blows against each other at the Magician’s Ivory Tower. He came with a fast charge that was accurately aimed at Sungjin’s empty shoulder. Sungjin raised Ariane and blocked his attack.

Clang!

The weight of the attack during the clashing of their swords was also much heavier than before.

‘H’oh...?’

While Sungjin was surprised, Franz suddenly shouted.

“Electro.”

And then,

Bzzzzzzz!!!

Franz’s sword gave off an electrical discharge. The electrical current flowed through Ariane and reached Sungjin which led him to forcefully push Franz’s sword away. Even though Franz was pushed away, the one to take damage was Sungjin.

‘Kuu... A sword that can conduct electricity. So even if I block, I’ll take damage...how troublesome.’

Franz whirled his sword and prepared to attack again. It seemed like he did not want to give Sungjin a chance to think.

“Uryaaaaaaaaa!”

He spun his two-handed sword like a windmill towards Sungjin. Blocking that electrified sword wasn't the answer. Sungjin ducked his head and dodged it.

Bzzt Bzzzzt!

A threatening sound brushed past the top of his head. Franz, who missed, just continued to turn his body around and once more brandished his sword. This time, at a lower angle. Sungjin dodged this one by jumping high.

However, Franz's sword didn't stop as it chased the jumping Sungjin. Franz had attacked predicting that the opponent would jump. It wasn't possible to dodge in mid-air. Sungjin had no choice but to swing Ariane below his feet to block Franz's sword.

Clang!

When he blocked,

Zzap!

Electricity came flowing through again. The arm holding Ariane became a bit numb, but Sungjin still kicked Franz while in that state.

“Haah!”

An unexpected blow.

Thud!

“Hrk!”

It seemed that Franz did not expect Sungjin to kick mid-air while blocking his sword. He staggered after taking a kick to the chest.

Sungjin did not come away unscathed. He was once again zapped with an electric shock when he was forced to block Franz's Sword.

After switching Ariane from his right hand to his left hand, he massaged his right hand once or twice.

‘Geez, taking damage even when I block... It’s such a great advantage for a swordsman.’

Sungjin wasn’t sure how Franz lost, but it seemed like Franz was not at all weak compared to Illich; if anything, Franz was slightly stronger.

‘Was he affected by Illich’s psychological warfare? Then again... Illich was the most cunning of the final 10 people.’

While Sungjin was having such thoughts, Franz suddenly chanted a spell.

“What is real is fake and what is fake is real! Illusion!”

Franz’s figure split into four parts. Sungjin pursed his lips as he watched this.

“Oh ho....”

The four Franz’s spoke at the same time.

“I learned some magic as you suggested. It would have been a waste otherwise to not utilize all that Magic and Mind Power.”

“Really? But there is a difference between knowing how to use magic and properly using it. Shall we see how good you are with it?”

“Yes! Please confirm it for yourself!”

When he observed the four Franz’s that were running towards him, the clones made by Illusion appeared exactly the same. They were impossible to tell apart just by outward appearances. The solutions that came immediately to mind were

‘Cain, bite that one’

Or

‘Soldamyr, tear them apart’

Sungjin could have used Summons to filter out the fakes. However to do so would be to break the rules. Furthermore,

‘Incinerate everything in your path! Fireball!’

Or

‘Binding Frost! Frostbite!’

He could use Magic to incapacitate Franz, but Sungjin wanted to save his Mana for ‘Time Reversal’. Sungjin held his sword as he waited for the approaching four Franz’s. Then two of those figures reached him at the same time.

“Hwah!”

“Hwah!

Their shouts were the same as well.

‘This might require some effort,’ thought Sungjin.

As he slowly backed off, he numbered each of Franz’s figures.

‘The front left is Number 1, the front right is Number 2, back left is Number 3, and the back right is Number 4.’

As Number 1 and 2 Franz’s simultaneously charged at him, he quickly ran to the left. When both Number 1 and 2 Franz’s made a sharp turn, the Number 1 Franz was almost cut in half by the Number 2 Franz’s sword.

‘That one is fake.’

As expected, Franz wasn’t used to operating the magic. He did not yet know that collisions between the real and the fake, and between the fake and the fake could cause them to disappear.

Now only three were left. Although it was unknown which of the three was real, Franz seemed to have realized his mistake and this time the three figures separated far from each other and attacked.

‘Which one is real...’

If he could use two swords, then he wouldn’t be too worried, but

since he could only use one his only option was to take a guess. Sungjin ran towards the one who was approaching him from the front. He avoided the swinging sword and cut that one's forearm. As soon as he did so, the illusion vanished.

‘This one's also a bust.’

The Number 3 and 4 Franz's came running from both the front and the back. The time to respond kept growing shorter, but there was no other choice. Sungjin turned towards Number 3 and stabbed that one's wrist before his sword could touch him.

Poof

However, that one was also a fake. Sungjin hurriedly turned his neck. And at that moment,

Slice

The Number 4 Franz's sword grazed past the back of Sungjin's hand.

“Woohoo!”

Franz stabbed his sword into the ground and shouted loudly.

“Mister Kei it's a thousand! A thousand! Will you keep your promise?”

After looking at Franz with a slightly dejected expression, Sungjin said.

“Aah, I'll keep it. That is if you can remember.”

“Huh?”

Sungjin immediately used his active skills in a flash when Franz tilted his head.

“Empower Magic”

The Ring of the Great Sage began to shine brightly.

“Mana Flow”

Ariane cried out.

Woouooooong

All the preparations were done. Sungjin immediately chanted the spell.

“Decisions that are never wrong, Regrets that never come to pass. Time Reversal.”

Franz stood by his grounded sword and stared at Sungjin. At the same time, Soldamyr who had been standing slightly apart from the two with his arms crossed made a slightly emotional expression as he gathered his arms together. During that short moment, Sungjin thought,

‘Did this work properly?’

Then, Franz’s lips moved. Very, very slowly.

“What Magic spell issss thaaaaaa...”

The words he spoke stretched as if they were words from a stretched tape. It felt as if time was flowing slowly, then suddenly time stopped. And,

‘Did it work?’

When Sungjin thought this again, suddenly time began to flow backwards. Soldamyr, who had been bringing his hands together, spread them and recrossed his arms, and Franz who had stabbed his sword into the ground picked it up again and held it.

Sungjin was also caught up in the Time Reversal. In the backwards flow of time, his view and his movements were also reversing. The back of his hand that had been cut by the Number 4 Franz was nicked by the sword again.

If there was a difference, then it was that as he was hit by the sword, the wound closed behind it. After Number 4, the Number 3’s wrist was stabbed once again. Then with a ‘poof’ sound, the Number 2 Franz was remade, and he could see Number 1 who was

cut by Number 2 Franz also appear again.

‘Until when is it going back?’

As Sungjin was pondering this, the reversal seemed to slow down. Time stopped once more and then it resumed.

“Hwah!”

“Hwah!”

The two Franz’s Number 1 and Number 2 charged towards Sungjin. Both were illusions. Regardless of whether they came or not, Sungjin just stood there. Number 1 and 2 swung their swords and attacked Sungjin’s neck and shoulders, respectively.

Poof

The moment the swords touched him they disappeared on their own. Afterwards,

“Uryaah!”

“Uryaah!”

Number 3 and 4 Franz’s jumped and came flying.

‘The answer is Number 4’

Sungjin similarly ignored the flying Number 3 and hit Number 4’s approaching wrist with the back of Ariane.

Thwap!

And with that sound,

“Ugh!”

Franz, who had lost his balance, fell. He stared at Sungjin as if he had seen a ghost and asked,

“How... How did... you know?”

Sungjin was about to reply when at that time the Operator let out a warning.

[Low Mana]

‘...The used Mana...It seems that this doesn’t come back.’

Sungjin raised his ring and said,

“Empower Magic.”

[On Cooldown]

As expected, The Ring of the Great Sage was on cooldown.

‘...Hrm...’

Sungjin became lost in his thoughts.

‘If you use the spell, then your Mana and active skills remain used. However, if it wasn’t like that...You could keep using it until you returned to the past...’

As Sungjin was having such thoughts, Soldamyr approached and said,

“If Master’s Mana is low, then ...”

Sungjin looked at the genie. Now that he thought about it, Soldamyr had wanted to use Time Reversal all of his life, but if the Magic worked like this, then he would never be able to witness the spell in action.

This was because, if Sungjin used this spell then those around him would see him use it and then forget about it the next moment.

Even the current Soldamyr was confused about whether Sungjin had used the spell or not. The item was definitely used, but he was standing there as if nothing had happened. Sungjin returned Ariane to its scabbard and said,

“Let’s end today’s spar here. Thank you, Franz. Go inside and rest. After a bit, let’s eat breakfast together.”

“Ah... Ok Kei.”

After Sunjin nodded his head once, he called Soldamyr over.

“Soldamyr, come here for a bit.”

“Yes, master.”

Soldamyr clearly did not see the effects of the magic. After explaining the effects to Soldamyr, Sungjin would have to consult him on how and when to best utilize it.

Chapter 139 – Black Market Eleventh Shopping (6)

Sungjin waved his hands about in the air as he tried his best to explain.

“When I noticed time slowing down... for a brief moment, it seemed to come to a stop before it began to flow backwards. It was as if...”

‘A tape had been played in reverse.’

Sungjin wanted to say this, but he stopped himself before he could since it was unlikely that Soldamyr knew what a tape was.

“It was as if a play was being acted out in reverse. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“Yes. And then?”

Soldamyr urged Sungjin on like a child at the amusement park. The genie had been saying that being able to use the Time Reversal magic was his lifelong aspiration, and it appeared to be true.

“Destroyed illusions reappeared, and the injury I sustained then vanished.”

Soldamyr kept on asking various things to satisfy his curiosity.

“How many seconds did you go back after using the spell?”

Sungjin racked his memory.

“Hrm...”

He had used the spell immediately after his hand was cut by the fourth illusion. Before this, he had said to Franz, ‘Aah, I’ll keep it. That is if you can remember.’

And then activated the items.

‘Empower Magic, Mana Flow’

After which, he used the spell

‘Decisions that are never wrong, Regrets that never come to pass.
Time Reversal.’

The point that he returned to was right after Franz had used the spell Illusion and charged at him as four.

‘Hwah!’

If he were to roughly estimate the time,

“Roughly about 10 seconds?”

“About 10 seconds... I see. 10 seconds at this amount of Magic Power...”

Soldamyr nodded his head. Sungjin said to Soldamyr,

“The effect was rather impressive. To reverse 10 seconds. To sum it up, it becomes possible to perfectly control everything that has happened. Did you see when I was able to immediately find the real one among the four illusions?”

“Yes.”

“When I did that, it ... felt like I had become God.”

Yes. After using the spell, everyone else except for him was stuck in the past. Sungjin could distinguish between Franz’s illusions without having to take a proper look at them.

‘The answer is Number 4’

Because he had already lived through the next 10 seconds of the future, he was able to pull off an otherwise impossible feat thanks to his knowledge.

If he were to utilize the Time Reversal spell with his swordsmanship, he would be able to give even Ariane a hard time. Sungjin imagined what it would be like to fight Ariane after using Time Reversal.

‘Going back 10 seconds in time after reading her attack pattern....

Ah... wait, if I act differently... Then she would definitely react accordingly as well.'

Sungjin asked Soldamyr when an idea suddenly came to mind.

"By the way, there's something I wanted to ask. If I use this spell, then do I have to go back all 10 seconds? If my Magic Power increases, for example, by twice then do I have to go back all 20 seconds?"

"That shouldn't be the case. According to the legends... It is said that the 'Great Sage' from the 'Ring of the Great Sage' that you wear, Anatol of the Blue Sky, could control how far back in time he went."

"Really?"

"Yes. If one reads his biography, such scenes appear several times. Returning to a crucial moment in time and using an appropriate magic. It is said that it was thanks to Time Reversal that high ranking magicians, demons, and dragons did not stand a chance against him."

"H'oh..."

"If you stop the spell while it's in operation, then you should be able to make time flow normally again at that moment. When Master was using the spell... When the play was going backwards, did you not think of making time flow forwards again?"

Sungjin thought back on that moment. At that time, the reversing time had been so interesting that the idea of actively doing something never occurred to him. All he did was observe.

"Yeah. Since it was also my first time using it..."

"It is likely that when your Magic Power increases, you can reverse time for even longer periods. It would be a good idea to figure out how to stop the reversal until then."

"Mm. The cooldown for Amplify Magic refreshes when the raid

ends. So I should use it during the raid, after the raid ends, and during the morning of the next day as well. If I practice it every time I get a chance, I'll get more and more used to it. You should be my sparring partner. Today when I activated it while battling Franz... I felt a bit sorry since it felt like I was playing around with him. Wouldn't it be helpful to your research if the sparring partner was you instead?

“It would be an honor, Master.”

Sungjin looked down towards the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ that was on his finger and said, “By the way, since the spell was used after multiplying my magic power by five, if I were to activate it without a boost, would it last about 2 seconds?”

“It could also be less than 2 seconds since the efficacy of Magic Power is still a profound mystery.”

“Hrm... Since it takes about 1 second just to chant the spell. To use it like that would be just a waste of mana.”

“Most likely.”

Right now, it seemed like he could only use the spell once a day while relying on the Ring of the Great Sage.

“I'll have to use it extremely carefully. And if possible... It's better to not use it. Even for me, there's always that chance of finding myself in a pinch.”

Soldamyr grinned as he asked,

“Given Master's ability, would there actually be such a situation?”

“Well... That's true but...”

Sungjin recalled the past.

‘Something that I regret...’

Now that he thought about it, there was one thing he did regret greatly.

‘I am boobs.’

Sungjin grasped his forehead with his hand. If he had access to Time Reversal back then, he would have used it immediately without hesitation. Time Reversal would also be helpful in situations other than combat. When hunting trolls, or when helping other hunters, and so on.

“For now I won’t use Time Reversal and leave it as a last resort. Since there could be many situations to use it other than in combat.”

“As Master wishes.”

While Sungjin and Soldamyr were discussing Time Reversal, the Operator’s alarm rang.

[It is 8:59]

It was time for the morning briefing.

“Ah... Operator, Staff of the Warlord.”

Sungjin removed the Staff of the Warlord from the cube. He drew a circle in the air with it and said, “Draft.”

Soon, the faces of four peoples appeared. The chosen hunters.

“Please come. Let’s eat breakfast, have a briefing, and then begin the raid.”

Having gotten used to the draft, the figures of the hunters soon appeared.

“Did you sleep well yesterday, Oppa?” asked Serin who appeared first.

Sungjin nodded his head as he replied,

“Yeah. You?”

“I also slept well.”

Nada appeared next.

“Good morning, everyone.”

Sungjin raised his hand and returned her greeting.

“Good morning.”

Franz appeared third and greeted the two beautiful ladies.

“Good morning. Let’s do well today as well, everyone!”

Baltren was the last to appear.

“A pleasure. To have the time to be able to discuss together like this before the raid is quite nice.”

“Please order first.”

They each ordered a simple breakfast. After finishing the meal, they began the briefing while having desserts and beverages like coffee and ice cream. Sungjin held up his Information Sheet. At the top of the Information Sheet was written ‘Information concerning Greenskin Fortress.’ Sungjin said to the hunters, “This raid takes place in Green Skin Fortress. Some of you might have probably guessed from the name, but... Do you remember Chapter 1? The Greenskin Wildlands that had goblins, orcs, and trolls.”

“Yes.”

This is the upgraded version of that. The boss is the King of Orcs, Grankel. And the hidden boss...”

Sungjin told them all the information that he knew. Points to be careful about in the raid, strategies for dealing with the boss, the location of the hidden boss, and so on.

“I don’t know where the hidden piece is yet, but... I should be able to find it in about 20 to 30 minutes after the raid begins. If you have difficulty finding it, call and ask me, since I can tell you about it even if I don’t transfer over.”

The hunters replied together as if they were elementary school students.

“Yes~”

“...Well, this raid shouldn't be that difficult since you're all skilled. Like I said before, there shouldn't be anything particularly difficult in Chapter 12 and 13. It's the 10 man raid, Chapter 14, that's dangerous. Until then, think of these two chapters as stepping stones for development and focus on your growth.

“Understood.”

“Then that will be all for today's briefing.”

After the briefing was over, the hunters returned one by one to their dimension.

“Stay safe everyone.”

“I hope everyone's luck with their teams is good.”

“Let's meet again at dinner.”

But Franz stayed behind.

“Uh... Mister Kei.”

Sungjin raised an eyebrow as he asked,

“Hrm? Is there something you want to say?”

“Today... I've thought about it carefully after our spar, but I still can't figure it out.”

“What?”

“How you were able to distinguish the real one?”

‘Ah... He's talking about that.’

Sungjin made a half-hearted excuse.

“Ah... That... I guessed. Normally people who use Illusion for the first time tend to hide the real card at the very end.”

“Ah... I see... Still, that was incredibly bold. Whatever the reason, but to be able to attack the real me so calmly...”

“You've never actually used the spell in a real fight, right?”

“Yes, not yet. Since all I did was buy some spells last night and memorize them.”

“Yeah. Well... It’s because you were purely a swordsman. As you keep using spells, you’ll become more proficient at utilizing them. You’ll become a more versatile swordsman.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Sungjin thought of the past suddenly as he conversed with Franz. He had also once heard something similar. Before his regression.

“Then I’ll take my leave.”

After Franz left, Sungjin resumed reliving his memory.

‘Sungjin you’re a great swordsman, but if you can use magic, then you’ll become even stronger.’

Now that he thought about it, the one who had said that was ‘Spell Master’ Edward.

‘Spells? When am I supposed to learn those? I don’t have enough as it is for Strength, Dexterity and Endurance. How will I get points to spend in Magic Power or Mind Power? Isn’t it fine with just you using magic?’

‘But if you at least learn them now, then... It will help in coping with unexpected situations.’

‘Mm... I suppose that’s true.’

‘Right?’

Sungjin creased his forehead. Recalling Edward’s friendly demeanor only dampened his mood even further.

‘In front of everyone he was like that, but behind he did such things... That guy... Really.’

At that time, the Operator notified him of the remaining time.

[30 minutes until the Raid begins.]

Sungjin quickly glanced at it.

‘Ah... Then I should use this.’

He removed ‘Lathion – Star of Solitude’ from the cube and said, “Solitary Training”

Like a bulb being switched on, the white star gave off a faint glow. Soon the Operator’s voice could be heard.

[You will proceed alone for the next raid. Difficulty will not be adjusted.]

Even if he had to proceed alone, a 5 man raid could no longer give him any sense of anxiety. Especially after he had overcome the hidden boss Ariane from the 10 man raid (though he didn’t win).

Now he even gained the chance to use Time Reversal and fix ‘mistakes’. For various reasons, he felt as if he had become nearly invincible.

‘Until Chapter 14... Well... There shouldn’t be any problems.’

Sungjin drank the iced americano he had ordered earlier and leisurely sat back in his chair.

Chapter 140 – Greenskin Fortress

“Ka’chui! Meda’ruk!”

“Ba’siru! Da’mim!”

The Greenskin Fortress was in a state of emergency. This was because a single human that had appeared out of nowhere was annihilating all of the fort’s soldiers. This human was none other than Sungjin.

Each time Sungjin’s sword danced, countless goblins, orcs, and trolls were sliced apart without distinction. The war between a fortress and a man raged on. But amidst all this,

“Hm~ Hmhmm~”

Amazingly, Sungjin was humming as he was massacring them. He was amazed at how drastically things had changed when he recalled how, in the past, he had slowly and carefully proceeded as a group of 5 to prevent dangerous situations from arising.

Sungjin climbed the stairs as he left behind a mountain of corpses. It did not take long to reach the floor where the King of Orcs, Grankel, resided. Because he had absentmindedly progressed without thinning their numbers, an enormous mob of Orcs now filled the large hall.

However, this was actually more desirable. Since now he didn’t have to put in as much effort in trying to find the monsters.

“Kwaah!”

A group of elite Orc soldiers charged at Sungjin. They were fearsome warriors whose rough muscles looked as if they would spring from the armor.

‘Even so, they’re just muscular pigs.’

They rushed at Sungjin, each holding an axe, a hammer, or a sword respectively. Sungjin blocked their weapons and cut their

armor and flesh as if he were dancing.

“Kuu!”

After slaughtering them for a while,

“Master, there’s a spell.’

Moon Specter warned him. Now that he looked, there was a high-level Orc Acolyte in the distance who was preparing to throw a fireball. It looked like the acolyte was ready to burn him, despite the presence of the Orc warriors that were grouped together with him.

‘Did they sell off their loyalty or something?’

However, the Orc Acolyte fired the spell without being concerned about such things. Externally, as he wore rags, he looked rather shabby, however, befitting the current chapter, the fireball that he threw was incredibly large.

Kwaaaaaaan!

Sungjin pulled out Artemio and absorbed the spell.

“Absorb Magic.”

Seeing the giant fireball suddenly disappear, the Orc acolyte and even the Orc warriors who were about to be sacrificed, opened their eyes wide in shock.

“Aren’t you going to thank me? I saved you.”

Sungjin swung the brightly shining Artemio and Moon Specter and cut the Orc warriors

“Kwauu...”

When he had cut down almost all of the orc warriors,

‘Master, there’s another spell.’

Moon Specter gave a warning.

“I know.”

He swung Artemio to return the fireball he had previously stored to the Orc Acolyte.

“Kwaa...”

The Orc Acolyte that had been chanting a spell was unable to finish his incantation and

Boom!

Was hit by the magic as it blew up. Thus the final floor was all cleaned up. In front of Sungjin was a huge iron door. The room of the normal boss. Sungjin pushed the doors and went in.

*

A single Orc was inclining on the throne when Baltren pushed the iron doors open and entered. The Orc looked quite serious, befitting a king. Furthermore, he knew how to speak the language of humans.

“Such arrogance! You dare challenge my throne?”

However, Baltren examined the nearby columns instead of listening to his words. According to Master Hunter Kei’s words, there was an ambush lying in wait. Baltren said to the hunters behind him,

“We’re first going to clear out the hidden archers first.”

The hunters nodded their heads.

“Then, let’s go.”

[Warning!]

[The King of Orcs ‘Grankel’ has appeared!]

Baltren charged at the King of Orcs alone as he heard the Operator’s warning. The archers that had been hiding behind the columns quickly appeared and shot their arrows at Baltren simultaneously.

Ping! Ping! Ping!

Baltren held up his mace and said,

“Magnetic Barrier”

A circular barrier appeared around Baltren. The flying arrows hit the barrier and fell to the ground. As this happened,

“Chain Lightning”

“Rapid Shot”

The hunters behind him killed the orc archers. When the ambush failed, Grankel rose from his throne and grabbed his two axes.

“Observe the power of this king!”

He charged at the hunters with his two axes in hand.

“Come!”

Baltren held up his shield and crashed violently into Grankel. The King of Orcs retaliated by swinging his two axes confidently.

Baltren blocked Grankel’s attacks with his shield and would occasionally hit back with his club. As they were exchanging blows, the other hunters cleared out the rest of the orcs. However, Grankel would occasionally scream loudly,

“Come and protect your King!”

Causing a bunch of Orcs to appear and attack the hunters. They have been fighting like this for a while. Grankel, who had been fiercely swinging his axes, suddenly ran backwards and hid behind his throne.

Baltren noticed that on the otherside of the throne was an Orc acolyte who was about to cast a spell. Beltran ran forwards and cried out,

“Shield of God!”

*

“Hwaaah!”

Franz stabbed his sword into Grankel's side.

“Kwaaah!”

Grankel shrieked and swung his axe, but it seemed that Franz had predicted this as he used his active skill “Electro” and blocked the axe. Electricity flowed from Franz's sword to Grankel's Axe, and to Grankel himself.

“Kwaaaaaah!”

The Orc King had been paralyzed by the electricity and temporarily could not move. At this moment, the hunters attacked. Franz also held his sword and charged at Grankel. Taking the combined attacks of the hunters,

“Kweeeeeeeeh~”

Grankel let out a shameful shriek that was no different from the other Orcs as he fell. Franz returned his sword to its sheath and said,

“He was called the king, but in his death, he was no different from others.”

Meanwhile, the hunters gathered around him and spoke to him.

“Wow... You're so amazing, Mister Franz.”

“You're so incredible. How did you get so strong?”

Franz smiled bashfully upon being suddenly praised.

“No, I'm not that great.”

One of them said,

“I think that Mister Franz must be the strongest of the remaining hunters.”

Franz chuckled when he heard that. More so since he had felt the enormous gap in strength just this morning.

“Eh... I'm not such an incredible person. There's someone twice as strong as me... No, even stronger than that.”

At those words, the other hunters were all surprised.

“Really?”

A few of them had doubtful expressions.

“Eh, no way...”

‘It’s the truth...’

Franz considered telling them but refrained. Because that person wasn’t someone who could be described in words.

“Anyways. Let’s go try and find the hidden piece. Is there anyone here who has the Treasure Hunter title?”

“Me.”

Someone raised his hand. Franz spoke to him,

“Then ask where we can find the hidden piece since I know where the hidden boss is.”

“Ah... Yes. Operator, I’ll use the Treasure Hunter Active. Tell me where the Hidden Piece is located.”

The verse that was the hint spilled from the cube.

[Wandering merchant from far away land]

[crossed the border with goods tightly wrapped.]

[He was captured, then, by orcish hands]

[One hope he had;]

[loose bricks of the underground cell]

[and the long teeth he had]

One of the hunters who heard the verse muttered,

“An underground prison... Was there something like that?”

*

Nada spun her dagger as she said,

“There was. A road on the 1st floor that went to the basement.”

“Is that so?”

“That’s fortunate. Since the hidden boss is said to be in the basement as well. Let’s go.”

At her words, one by one the hunters wordlessly walked towards the basement.

“Kwaaah!”

A few Orc warriors charged at the hunters, but they were not a threat. They lost their lives to Nada’s black magic,

“Powers of Corruption, unleash the blight upon the living. Decay of Death!”

Subservient zombies,

“Domingo, bite them.”

‘Whir’

And her elegant dagger. She did not sweat at all despite killing for so long. She said to the hunters,

“Let’s continue. There’s no time.”

The hunters could do nothing but silently obey her due to her image. An incredible appearance and a nice body. There were hunters that had to swallow their saliva when looking at her figure, but even so, it was difficult to think of doing something to her.

Her charisma was that overflowing. As said in the verse, there was a large prison in front of them when they arrived at the basement.

“Kweeh”

After killing the prison wardens, the hunters went in and opened up the jail cells. Inside the prison, there were prisoners of a variety of different species.

When the prisoners ran away saying,

“Thank you.”

The Orcs chased after them with bare hands. The hunters searched each prison cell one by one. But the hidden piece could not be found.

“Hrm... This is strange... This should be the only place that would have an underground prison...”

During all of this, Nada had been closely looking at a jail cell.

“Come here and look.”

That cell had been an empty room without a prisoner inside it. It seemed that she had discovered something there. She pointed at one of the walls with her dagger when the hunters gathered and said,

“Remember? It said that his only hope was a loose brick.”

There indeed was a rather fragile looking segment in the wall of the cell. When a hunter holding a bat struck that spot

Rumble

The bricks collapsed. Inside, there was a long passageway.

*

Inside that passageway was the Merchant Rat that Serin Han had met a long time ago. Judging from his brown teeth, it seemed that he had been digging a tunnel using them. When the Merchant saw the hunters, he was at first surprised.

“Who are you guys? Humans? How did you come here?”

When he realized who it was that had found him, he changed his attitude.

“Aah. Of course, Hunters. Hey, let me go. If you do, I’ll give you this.”

He took out a rock that had been hanging from his chest.

It was an Enhancement Stone. The Hunters let him loose, and

each took an Enhancement Stone. Having collected the hidden piece, they turned their view towards Serin, no, towards Mustafa.

“You said that you know where the Hidden boss is, right?”

Serin replied in a deep voice.

“Yes, follow me.”

She led the hunters to the chief warden’s room. Inside the chief warden’s room there was a square carpet on the floor.

‘If I move this... He said that there would be something below it...’

She moved the carpet as Sungin had instructed. Below it, was a wooden door. The hunters opened the door to find another passageway that led downwards.

“A basement below the basement... It feels a bit eerie.”

“So, do we run away now?”

“That’s not it.”

One of the hunters said,

“It’s rare when all five survive to the end, so we should take this opportunity to hunt the hidden boss, don’t you think?”

The hunters nodded their heads one by one. This was because they had someone they believed in. Which was the ‘Chosen One’ Serin Han, who had changed to Mustafa.

The hunters who saw her skill which caused holes to appear in the heads of far-away Orcs without having to lay a hand on them, believed that this raid was a golden opportunity for them to earn points.

They headed underground without any unnecessary remarks. There was a long corridor that stretched for a while inside. As they continued to proceed inside, the corridor became wider and wider.

“Huh... There was a place like this?”

But as they continued, something that sounded like a bizarre chant could be heard from the inside.

“Ohm. Meni. Xion. Ra. Catah. Mion.”

The hunters went inside and looked. Inside, there was some kind of shrine. There was an altar overflowing with blood, on which there were pieces of flesh and a sharp glaive. A Celebrant chanted in the front.

“Laru. Hen. Catah. Bel. Mio.”

And behind him were about a dozen Orcs sitting with their heads bowed down. One of the hunters said,

“What is this...”

At that moment, the chanting stopped. The orcs simultaneously turned to look at the hunters. However, something was wrong. Different from the other Orcs, the eyes of these Orcs shone with an obvious red light.

[Warning. Hidden Boss]

[The Acolyte of Yanhurat, Varmil, and his cultists have appeared]

The hunters positioned themselves into a formation they had previously discussed to face the hidden boss. The formation they had chosen, was none other than a formation that protected Serin. Behind the cover of the other hunters, Serin Han pulled out the book, Arabian Nights, from her bosom and opened it.

“Kwaaaaaaaaauuruuu!!”

The Orcs, who had gone berserk, charged at the hunters. Serin Han began to urgently read the contents of the book.

“Ali Baba stood in front of the stone door and said, ‘Open Sesame!’”

Chapter 141 – Greenskin Fortress (2)

[The Acolyte of Yanhurat, Varmil, and his cultists have appeared]
Sungjin listened to the Operator's warning and thought, '...Yanhurat's cultists?'

Yanhurat was none other than the guy who whispered, 'Kill! Kill!'

Into his ear.

"Kwaaaaah!"

Several red eyed Orcs charged at Sungjin. Judging by the redness of their eyes, the Orcs were far gone.

'Now that I think about it... The hidden boss in Chapter 1 looked similar as well...'

Every single one of the charging Orcs was faster than King Grankel. Sungjin fought with them as he ran backwards. Because there were so many of them, if he got surrounded, it would not be easy even for him to deal with them. Sungjin sheathed Moon Specter, and then shouted as he pulled it out, "Deathly Wail"

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!"

The spirit of Moon Specter shrieked as she circled the sword, causing even the Orcs who had lost their sanity to be scared out of their wits and flee. During this time, Sungjin pulled out the figurine of Cain and threw it into the air. Soon Cain appeared in mid air.

"Grrrrr!"

Sungjin then rang 'Manyata – Master's Bell'. Cain, who was now invincible, began to rip apart the Orcs with an incredibly fast speed. Sungjin swung his swords in tandem with him. The crazed Orcs gave no heed to being cut and kept rushing in.

‘If they’re like this then... They’re not really suitable to test against.’

Even though he wanted to practice Time Reversal, they weren’t quite suitable for it.

‘It’ll be better to use it against the trolls.’

Sungjin dropped his thoughts and focused on cutting down the Orcs instead. Within a minute, [Hidden Boss, ‘The Priest of Yanhurat, Varmil, and his Cultists’ Cleared.]

Sungjin pulled out his sword that had been stabbed into the last Orc’s heart.

“Whew...”

He lightly caught his breath. Although this Hidden boss was one of the strongest enemies he had faced thus far, Sungjin had grown to a point that with the exception of having summoned Cain, he cleared the raid without using any of his item’s active skills.

“Hmm, if it’s this much...”

Sungjin recalled his distant memories.

‘I’m about three... no four times stronger than I was in the past.’

However, he couldn’t be satisfied with this. Since the “Demon King’s Castle raid” in which he died wasn’t that far off. Until then, he had to become even stronger. Sungjin prepared to transfer dimensions. However, now that he thought about it, he didn’t hear the sound, ‘Raid 100% complete.’

‘I found the hidden piece and even killed the hidden boss...’

This could only mean that there were still Orcs that were alive. Sungjin called out to Cain.

“Cain”

“Arf”

“Do you think there are any Orcs remaining here?”

Cain raised his nose,

‘Sniff sniff’

And after smelling the air, he raised his snout and cried out.

“Woof Woof”

Sungjin was now able to somewhat understand what Can was saying. Raising his snout was a sign of affirmation.

“Lead the way. Since I have to kill them quickly and go troll hunting.”

“Woof”

At Sungjin’s words, Cain dashed out like a bullet. He unexpectedly headed up the stairs. It seems that he had missed some Orcs when he was heading down after clearing the regular boss. Since it was a solo raid, he had no need of worrying about others.

‘I won’t leave a single one alive.’ thought Sungjin as he followed Cain.

He was slowly becoming a perfectionist. Sungjin followed Cain’s guidance to the 2nd floor of the fortress and killed a team of Orcs.

[Raid 100% complete.]

He finally heard that phrase.

[Beginning reward distribution.]

[Monsters slain. Goblin: 100, Steel Troll: 20, Orc Warrior...]

Sungjin received all 15000 stat points and 15000 Black Coins by himself. It was natural as he had started the raid alone and killed all the enemies by himself. Since the stat bonus from ‘Lathion – Star of Solitude’ and the coin bonus from ‘Heart of Gold’ were both 10%, he received the same amount of stat points and Black Coins.

[And now we will distribute the items.]

[Corsian – The King’s Axe]

[Bueltarah – The Pursuer’s Boots]

[Enhancement Stone]

This time the items he received were an axe, and a pair of boots.

[Last but not the least, you will be awarded titles you’ve earned on this raid.]

The title Sungjin received this time was ‘Highlander’.

‘Haven’t I seen this somewhere before?’

When he thought about it, it had been the title that Franz had used before he became a ‘Chosen One’. The contents of the title were [When receiving a fatal blow, revive with 100% of your maximum health. When the title is not worn, instead of half, revive with 10% of your maximum health. After reviving, this title will disappear.]

It was a good title. It was a bit defensive, but in this raid where you did not know when you might die, the title was had its practical use.

‘There probably won’t be a time where I’ll have it equipped... But it’s worth having.’

It was the same as having received an extra life. Sungjin had a satisfied smile on his face when [Returning to the Black Market in 10 minutes.]

The Operator let out an alarm. Sungjin said to her, “Ah, I’m not returning. That’s ok right?”

[Early return canceled. Returning to the Hunter’s Hall as scheduled in 1 hour and 42 minutes]

Sungjin returned to the top floor where the King of Orcs had resided.

“Rename. To Adjudicator.”

He used the Star of the Nameless to change his title and then used

the Trollseeker Marble.

“Pursuit of Justice”

However, an unexpected answer was heard.

[No applicable dimension available]

‘Hrm?’

Sungjin looked back and forth between the Trollseeker Marble and the Operator Cube.

‘Did I clear too early?’

But he had been chasing full completion, so he was not particularly fast in completing this chapter. Compared to the time when he had only killed the boss and the hidden boss in Dark Elven City, or the first time he was able to nonchalantly beat a 5 man raid back in Kariharan Frostplains, he was slower on this raid.

‘Then just what is the problem?’

Sungjin crossed his arms and thought for a moment when Besgoro interjected, ‘Isn’t it possible that all of the potential trolls have been weeded out?’

“Just what are you saying...”

Sungjin wanted to reflexively disregard that statement, but then on another thought it seemed possible. After the last raid, there were about 100,000 hunters left. If you divide it into 5 man parties, then there were about 20,000 groups currently. Therefore, the likelihood of a troll appearing had significantly decreased. Sungjin said to Besgoro, “... That’s a possibility.”

‘Right?’

Since Besgoro had always lost all self-control when it came to women and their body, Sungjin had come to disregard his ability recently. Sungjin propped his chin on his hand and thought, ‘Now the number of hunters is quite low... And the number of trolls I’ve caught until now should be quite large...’

Furthermore, as they proceeded into the latter half of the raid people became more doubtful, so it wasn't as easy to troll.

'But still, if there are 100,000 people then it should still work...'

Sungjin decided to kill some time. First,

"Operator, allocate 4000 to Strength, 4000 to Dexterity, 3000 to Endurance, 4000 to Mind Power."

He allocated the stat points that he earned. The Chosen Ones were likely still in the middle of their raids. By allocating his stats first, it would make their raid progression easier. Afterwards, of the items that Sungjin received this time, he put aside the axe that he would never have a reason to use, and examined the boots.

Bueltarah – The Pursuer's Boots

Legendary Shoes – Defense 30%

Passive Skill

Stride of Salvation (I) – When running towards an ally with less than 30% health, move 200% faster.

Steps of Punishment (I) – When running towards an enemy with less than 30% health, move 200% faster.

Heroes are bound to rise in turbulent times.

Sungjin looked at those boots.

"Hooh..."

They were good. It also might have been used by one of the final 10 people before.

'Was it Araujo? Or was it Umkhuba?'

Either way, it would be good whether it was used for punishment or salvation. Sungjin looked down at the shoes he was wearing now. The Swift Paw that he had obtained all the way back in Chapter 2. Heroic boots.

No matter how you looked at it, the boots that he just received

were much better. Recently Sungjin had often been riding either Shadowrun, Cain, or Rajenta, so there were not many opportunities for him to use the active skill either. There wasn't any reason to deliberate on this. Sungjin held up those boots and said, "Equip."

The Swift Paw that he had been wearing was taken off, and the new shoes were worn. Sungjin picked up Swift Paw and placed it inside the cube. And as if those shoes were a person, he said, "You've worked hard until now."

Having changed his shoes, Sungjin walked in place a few times. The equipped shoes changed to match his shoe size.

'It sure fits well.'

He had allocated his stat points. He had exchanged his equipped item. Now some time had passed. Wearing his new shoes, Sungjin raised the marble again.

"Pursuit of Justice"

Then

[Request for Dimensional transfer has been granted.]

This time the dimensional transfer had succeeded. His earlier attempt might have failed due to the combination of having been initiated too early with there being a smaller pool of people.

[You will be teleported in 10 seconds. 10, 9...]

Sungjin waited the 10 seconds while standing. As he stood, he thought, '10 man raid... Chapter 14... And once chapter 17 is over then troll hunting should become almost impossible.'

It seemed that his 'troll hunting', which had continued for a few chapters, was slowly coming to an end. Although Sungjin felt slight frustration, he thought to himself 'Until then, I'll have to earn a lot.'

And he was teleported to another dimension.

‘Wooosh’

Luckily, there was a troll standing next to Sungjin who had appeared with the light.

“Hi”

It seemed that the guy had barely successfully trolled. He was covered in blood and drinking a potion.

“What the hell are you?”

He was already no longer apprehensive about facing trolls, but seeing one drinking a bottle of potion deflated what little tension he had left. Sungjin activated the Basilisk’s Eye that he was wearing, “Stay still. Snake Eye”

And petrified him since it would be annoying if he runs away. However, the troll used the “Iron Will” title to relieve the petrification. It seemed that the Raids had now reached a point where everyone had some ability to break free of this level of paralysis.

‘How annoying.’

Sungjin was preparing himself to chase after the troll, but the troll did not choose to flee. Instead, “I don’t know what you are, but come at me, you bastard.”

The troll held up his sword and shield in preparation to fight and faced Sungjin.

“Thank you.”

After Sungjin sincerely expressed his thanks to him, he charged at the troll. The hunter on seeing Sungjin approach, raised his shield and prepared to receive him. Sungjin grinned and Swish Swish

In a second he sent the troll’s shield and sword flying away.

“Wh... What?!”

The troll's eyes opened wide as if some sort of sorcery had happened.

“Like I said, I'm thankful. That you didn't run away.”

In the next second, Sungjin

Stab

Stabbed his sword into the troll between his armor.

“Uu... Uwaaaah!”

Having just realized the difference in ability, the troll finally began to run away. Sungjin let go and counted to three before he began to chase him. And thanks to his new shoes, ‘Whoa...’

His pace had definitely become faster. Sungjin caught the runaway again after a few seconds.

“Sorry, the reason why I didn't kill you before... I wanted to try out my newly acquired item.”

The troll's eye grew wide in fear. It looked like he was about to start begging for his life. But before he could, Sungjin quickly cut the troll's throat.

‘Thud’

He didn't want to feel any unnecessary feelings of guilt from the trolls as well.

After picking up the items, Sungjin headed to the King of Orc's throne and threw himself on the chair. Since he hunted the trolls right after he transferred dimensions, there was still some time left. He had already allocated his stat points. He had already exchanged his equipped item. There was nothing to do.

‘What to do now?’

Thinking this made Sungjin think,

‘I should check on the others to see how they are doing.’

“Operator”

Sungjin called the Operator and took out the Staff of the Warlord. He then drew a circle with it and said, “Inspection.”

Chapter 142 – Greenskin Fortress (3)

Sungjin examined how the other ‘Chosen Ones’ were progressing. Baltren’s and Franz’s progress was a bit slow. Whether or not they had obtained the clue about the hidden piece, those two were still looking around the prison, unable to find the wandering merchant ratman.

‘Well... They’ll probably find it soon.’

If they can’t find it, then he can go and help them. The one who had progressed the fastest was Serin Han. She was fighting against the hidden boss in the basement.

One peculiarity was that there were bulky men wearing turbans having a bloody fight against the crimson orcs. Furthermore, it wasn’t just one or two, but dozens of men to the point that they seemed to be countless.

They each used their scimitars to fight with the orcs, and when their necks were broken or their hearts stabbed through, they would disappear from that spot while creating ‘poof’ sound.

‘What is that... Did Serin summon them? Is it Arabian Nights? Ali Baba and the 40 thieves?’

Regardless of how it had happened, she was ceaselessly shooting arrows while receiving their protection.

‘Ping~ Ping! Ping~!’

Every time she shot an arrow,

‘Thud! Thud! Thud!!’

The arrows would be embedded in the orcs’ heads. Only a few Orcs remained alive, and this raid looked to be over soon.

‘She’s doing well.’

Lastly, Nada was just about to begin the fight against the hidden

boss.

‘This should be worth watching.’

Sungjin propped his chin on his hand and watched.

*

The way down to the hidden boss.

Nada, who was standing in front of the entrance said,

“Before we go down, everyone please gather.”

At those words, the hunters gathered themselves into a line. Somewhere along the raid, they began to follow her words like the zombie ‘Domingo’ that she kept with her. Nada chanted a spell upon them.

“Protection of Darkness, return everything to null, Dark Shield!”

Soon a black colored shield covered the hunters and Domingo. Nada then said,

“Be careful when we go down, we’re going to see many crazed orcs and the Hidden bosses’ attacks will be so fast that it will be difficult to deal with. So prepare yourselves.”

Everyone nodded their heads to Nada’s words. Having confirmed that they were all ready, she commanded,

“Then let’s go.”

And headed towards the basement first. A bizarre chant flowed out from inside. Before much time had elapsed, they were soon facing the Priest of Yanhurat and the crazy orcs.

[Warning!]

At the same time as the Operator’s warning,

“Kwaauuurrrrr!!”

The crimson eyed orcs began to swarm the hunters.

‘When we go down, we’re going to see many crazed orcs.’

Though the hunters had received Nada's warning, they couldn't properly react to the orcs' speed and fervor.

Nada, who had warned them, was also the same. Though she had heard the story from Kei this morning, they were faster and crazier than expected when she finally ran into them.

The hunters had to deal with 2-3 orcs each as they charged at them. As such, an orc managed to close in on Nada who was in the rear.

"Awowooo!"

The orc randomly swung his hammer horizontally and diagonally while charging at Nada. It was an irregular movement, but Nada calmly blocked the orc's blunt weapon with the staff in her left hand and then swung her dagger to cut off the orc's hand.

'Thud thud'

Several fingers that had been holding the blunt weapon were cut off and fell to the ground. Seeing this, Nada was about to catch her breath; however, the orc showed no signs of pain. Rather, upon seeing blood,

"Kwaaaaaau!"

Charged at Nada as if it was more crazed than before. It was unarmed now, but if she were caught by those hands then it would become quite messy.

"Shit!"

Nada barely blocked the orc's hand with her staff, and then once again used her knife to stab into the orc's chin. The dagger that penetrated the orc's chin even cut through his lip, but it seemed the crazed orc did not feel either fear or pain.

Despite one hand becoming stump and being skewered by the dagger, he still swung his arms. He was now more grotesque than a zombie. This wasn't the only problem. From the back, two more

orcs came charging towards her. If it was one orc, then maybe, but three was just impossible. Nada urgently called her zombie,

“Domingo!”

However, Domingo was being torn apart by two other orcs. There was no one that could help her. Nada kicked the orc in the stomach as she pulled out the dagger that had pierced him.

“Kweeh!”

The orc stumbled backward. As this happened two orcs rushed towards her. One orc held an axe, and the other held a long sword.

Nada barely blocked the axe with her staff and the long sword with her dagger. However, what would happen next was the problem. The orc whose chin had been smashed rushed at Nada again. There was no manner in which she could deal with his two hands. However, at that moment,

“Ah-ta!”

A hunter appeared from somewhere and kicked that orc in the side. It was the ‘Elite Pugilist’. It was the most trustworthy ally she had met in this raid. Following this, he lowered his stance before swinging his long legs like a windmill. It was an attack aimed at the two orcs that were in a contest of strength with Nada.

‘Thud! Thud!’

The orcs who were kicked in the shin had their legs broken like a twig sideways and fell over. Having received some breathing room, Nada immediately chanted a spell before the orcs could stand up.

“Come, vengeful spirits! Graves Call!”

Soon, pale hands shot out from the ground near Nada and grasped the limbs of the fallen crazed orcs. The orcs moved and struggled with all their might, but the hands of the dead did not let them go. At that moment, Nada took her dagger and stabbed at their hearts.

‘Stab stab’

The orcs whose hearts were stabbed still struggled crazily, but they went limp after spewing a fountain of blood. Nada tried to express her thanks to the ‘Elite Pugilist’ who saved her. However,

“Ahtaho!”

He was no longer there as he had already gone to save the other hunters. The ‘Elite Pugilist’ was tall and wore a martial arts uniform, and despite being white, he oddly practiced Eastern martial arts. Regardless, Nada, having just caught her breath, began to help the other hunters by using her signature spell.

“Tense muscles, brittle bones, Weakness!”

After cursing the entire group of orcs,

“Unholy power, strip the skin and expose the bones! Frenzy!”

She used the spell on the zombie Domingo in order to allow it to put up a real fight against the orcs. In the start of the battle, they had been pushed back, but now it was beginning to turn in their favor.

‘Good.’

Having thought this, Nada held her dagger and was prepared to leap into battle. However at that time,

Shooooom~

Suddenly a long beam of light came from the sky, and a single man appeared. This was none other than Kei.

“What?”

While Nada was surprised, that person started to cut up the orcs like a hurricane.

“Geez, get lost!”

He cut about halfway through the neck of an orc that was wrestling with a hunter, with their foreheads touching each other,

‘Clang! Clang! Bang!’

Stabbed through the heart of an orc that had been banging on a shield with its club in a crazed manner.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaah!”

And cut the wrists of the orc that was in a contest of strength with the ‘Elite Pugilist’. Now free to act, the ‘Elite Pugilist’ hit the orc’s head with a satisfying roundhouse kick.

“Ahta!”

The orc’s head turned halfway around, and it didn’t move again. After Kei had joined in, the difficulty of the raid had significantly fallen.

This was because that person went around the place like lightning while killing orcs, or turning them into cripples, allowing the other hunters to finish off the leftovers. Before long,

[Hidden Boss Clear!]

The Operator let out a message. Excluding Nada, the other hunters looked at Kei with incredulity. Nada approached him and said,

“What’s this, when I ask you to help you didn’t come... Why did you arrive this time? We could’ve killed it ourselves.”

To her words, Kei shook his swords from left to right, and said,

“Aaah, there’s another reason why I came here.”

“Huh?”

As Nada tilted her head, Sungjin removed the helmet he was wearing and said,

“There’s a person here I want to take.”

Then, a voice could be heard from behind her.

“...You are...”

It was the voice of the 'Elite Pugilist'. While Nada was confused, Kei approached him and asked,

“Do you remember me? Mahadas.”

“Of course. Mister Kei”

Since they knew each other's names, it seemed that they had already met each other somewhere before. Nada leaned to a side and stared at them.

‘So you don't come when I ask for help... But you come to recruit that person, is that right.’

Regardless of whether she stared or not, Kei shook hands with the 'Elite Pugilist' Mahadas, and then suddenly whispered. She couldn't hear, but she had a rough idea of what it was about.

‘Become our ally.’

Sure enough, as expected Mahadas looked back and forth between Kei and her. This meant that he was listening to the explanation about the 'Chosen Ones'. Nada didn't say anything. They had only fought once, but the 'Elite Pugilist' had good skill and was a selfless person. After exchanging a hushed conversation with him, Kei said,

“Nada, and the other hunters, please stay here for a bit.”

And the two left the basement first. Nada crossed her arms and stared at the two as she thought,

‘It looks like there will be six of us for dinner tonight.’

*

“Baptize”

Sungjin poured the Holy Water of Baptism on Mahadas' head. Once it was over, Sungjin grasped his shoulder and said,

“Then, let's meet again at dinner.”

“Excuse me?”

Mahadas frowned slightly at Sungjin's baffling suggestion, but there was no time to give a detailed explanation now.

"You'll know soon. For now, don't eat dinner today and wait."

"... I understand."

After Sungjin left him, he used the Trollseeker Marble to transfer to a different dimension.

"Pursuit of Justice"

Thankfully, there still were some trolls that were active. Sungjin caught them and cut them up while picking up two items from each troll. It was a bit regretful that he couldn't meet Edward who was definitely active somewhere.

'If he's alive then he's definitely going to be doing some troll like actions...'

As Sungjin thought this, he used the three, four, and then finally all five of the Trollseeker Marbles. The troll that he met in the last dimension was a thin sleazy looking Eastern person.

'This one is not it as well...'

Though Sungjin was slightly disappointed, he still pulled out his sword and held it. It was work nonetheless.

"Who are you?"

Having seen Sungjin, the troll threateningly held up his blood covered sword and asked. Looking down, the corpses of the hunters were below him.

'Regretful...'

While he was doing this, the troll suddenly used an active skill and disappeared.

"Shadow Walk."

Sungjin creased his forehead. This was because it would be troublesome if the troll ran away like the last time when Illich

became invisible.

“Haa... Annoying...”

Sungjin walked towards where the troll had disappeared. Since this wasn't the frostplains, hence nothing could be seen.

‘What should I do? I can't use Cain to smell... Should I just destroy everything around here with magic?’

While Sungjin was thinking,

‘kata-kata’

Footsteps could be heard from behind him. Sungjin turned to his back while swinging Moon Specter. The troll that had been trying to assassinate him twisted his body backwards and barely avoided it.

“Hooh... Your ears are quite good.”

He said in admiration.

“Oh well. I guess I'll just have to kill you face to face.”

Sungjin chuckled when he heard this. “What... You're already dead, bastard.”

“What?”

While facing the troll, Sungjin

“Amplify Magic. Mana Flow.”

used both active skills,

“Time Reversal”

And reversed time. Time started to go backwards. Sungjin turned around and brought back Moon Specter at the same moment as the man disappeared into invisibility. Time had gone back by about 10 seconds. The troll, same as before, threateningly held up his sword and asked,

“Who are you?”

Sungjin acted the same as he did previously and looked towards the pitiful hunters at the troll's feet. Then the troll,

“Shadow Walk”

Similarly hid in stealth again. Sungjin also purposefully walked towards where the troll had been. And after pulling out Moon Specter and holding it backwards, he threw it behind his back.

“Pa!”

The flying Moon Specter

‘kata-kata!’

‘Stab’

Was embedded into the leg of the approaching troll.

“Kwaaaaaak!”

The troll shrieked and collapsed in place. When Sungjin approached him, he asked,

“How... How did you...”

To his words, Sungjin grinned and said,

“My ears are quite sensitive.”

Chapter 143 – Black Market Twelfth Shopping

Black Market Twelfth Shopping

[Low Mana]

The Operator let out a warning as Sungjin looked down at his hand.

“Hrm...”

He adapted to it faster than he had thought he would, perhaps because the events had occurred exactly at the same time.

‘After I use it one or two more times... I should be able to utilize it perfectly.’

Sungjin looked at the fallen troll as he thought. Two items were laid out in front of the troll. He gathered up both of them and placed them inside the cube.

“Operator, how long until I’m summoned back to the Black Market?”

[14 minutes and 8 seconds.]

There was still some time remaining even after he completed everything that he could be doing. Sungjin once again held the Sceptre of the Warlord and looked at the other hunters.

“Inspection”

The first to kill the hidden boss, Serin Han, was already inside a shop in the Black Market eating a slice of cheesecake. In other words, she had achieved 100% Raid Progression after killing all of the remnant soldiers that were still alive.

‘As expected... Is this the power of Arabian Nights?’

Mahadas and Nada’s party that he had intervened were

[Your contribution is...]

receiving their rewards. It seemed that this side had also achieved 100% completion. The interesting part was that from Nada's cube, the figure of Mahadas could be seen, and from Mahadas' cube, the figure of Nada could be seen.

‘Now that I think about it... It's the first time I'm seeing more than one ‘Chosen One’ in the same party. Even though it's because I just went and baptized one of them.’

Baltren and Franz, who had been progressing a bit slowly, had killed the hidden boss and were searching for the leftover mobs. Seeing as all five members were alive in both parties, they would easily be able to achieve 100% completion in the remaining time.

‘If things are like this... They shouldn't need any help.’

Having confirmed this, Sungjin called out to the Operator and said,

“Operator, send me to the Black Market now.”

The Operator immediately accepted his request.

[Teleporting to the Black Market in 10 seconds.]

The Operator seemed to be reasonably flexible as long as the main objective of the raid was completed.

*

‘Clack’

The ice cubes in the coffee melted and made some noise. Sungjin, as always, sat in the cafe ‘First Drop’ and organized the items.

‘6000 to 7000 for this...’

Among those items was the ‘Swift Paw’ that he had been using. Sungjin held up those wolf's paws and wondered,

‘Would anyone buy this...’

In reality, as it was a Heroic rank item, it would not sell well.

This was because most of the hunters that had survived until now would have 'Heroic' or 'Legendary' tier items for almost all parts.

'For now, I should try putting it up for 2000 to 3000, and if someone buys it, then good. Otherwise, I can just sell it at the store.'

Thought Sungjin, as he placed the item in the cube. Having finished his calculations, Sungjin exited the cafe and walked towards the Auction House.

"Welcome, Dear Hunter."

As always, the Auction House was presided over by the three pig siblings. After Sungjin placed the items up for sale, he asked them,

"How is it? The number of items in the Auction House has fallen down recently, right?"

"Unfortunately, yes it has. Since the total number of hunters has decreased."

Upon hearing this, Sungjin thought,

"As expected... There isn't much time left for this, either."

The number of hunters decreases as the chapters continued to pass. At the end of Chapter 11, there were about 100,000 hunters. After the end of the incredibly difficult Chapter 14, that number would decrease to less than half.

Furthermore, by the end of the next 10 man raid in Chapter 17, the hunters would be running into people they had already met before. Due to his prior experience, Sungjin knew about this well.

'Until then I have to earn as much as I can... Though strictly speaking, I don't really have anything to use it on.'

Still, Sungjin asked the pig siblings just to make sure.

"By chance, are there any legendary items up for sale?"

"Ah, yes, there are. Would you like to see the list?"

“Yes.”

Many types of items appeared in front of Sungjin’s eyes. However, most of the items that appeared were weapons. This was because everyone would wear armor, and sell the weapons that they didn’t use.

‘I guess there isn’t any point in looking.’

There was no point since Sungjin already had 3 Unique Legendary weapons. Though it would be a different case if there were 3 Ariane’s on sale. However, since it was a weapon that he had made, from the beginning, there wouldn’t be more than 1 in existence. Sungjin shook his hand and said,

“There’s nothing to buy... As always, send me the receipts of items that sell.”

“Yes, Dear Hunter”

Afterwards, Sungjin visited Kargos’s smithy. He had obtained two enhancement stones from the last raid, and another two from this raid. Sungjin first handed Ariane to him and said,

“Please upgrade this to Unique Legendary. That’s possible right?”

“Hrm, yes. It’ll take more effort, but... Well, I get it.”

“And...”

Sungjin took off the earring that he had worn on his ear and showed it to Kargos.

“Is it also possible for this to have its tier upgraded? It’s a heroic earring...”

That was none other than ‘Trite – Eye of Jeremiah’. The item that can read one’s surface level thoughts. Because the duration was only 10 seconds, it would be good if the tier could be increased. Kargos received the two items and said,

“There’s no reason I can’t.”

“How much for the two?”

“It’ll be 13,000.”

“I’ll pay now.”

Sungjin used the Black Coins that he received from this raid’s distribution to pay off the expenses of the two upgrades.

“Then, as always, I’ll come in the morning.”

“Sure.”

Sungjin left Kargos’s smithy and looked up at the sky. The sky in the Black Market was always clear and blue.

Now there wasn’t much time left until the ‘Demon King’s Castle Raid’ where the hunters had first failed. Also, the Merchant of Darker than Black had said the final chapter wasn’t far off from the ‘Demon King’s Castle Raid’.

‘Then... That means that the final raid itself isn’t that far off...’

Until then, he wanted to prepare the strongest party and remove all uncertainties. From that perspective, this raid was truly successful.

He had achieved 100% raid progression alone, successfully hunted trolls, properly used Time Reversal in an actual fight, and more; however, the most important thing he had done probably was recruiting Mahadas.

Sungjin had wondered what he should do if he couldn’t meet Mahadas again. Thankfully Mahadas was still alive and, of all things, it was possible for them to meet through ‘Inspection’ since he was in the same party as Nada.

Judging an individual’s characters is incredibly difficult. It was fortunate that he had been able to recruit someone as qualified as Mahadas.

‘It really did go well.’

After returning to ‘Ninety Nine Nights’, Sungjin used Sceptre of the Warlord and called together the ‘Chosen Ones’. Of course, the new recruit was included amongst them.

“Please take care of me.”

Upon seeing the calm, blue-eyed man clasping his hands together, the original members were a bit awkward at first, but they soon became aware his good-naturedness and began to get along well.

With this, there was a total of 5 ‘Chosen Ones’. The party now became a group of six, with four positions remaining. The remaining positions were both a source of anticipation and anxiety.

‘I have to fill up the positions with decent people in the remaining time...’

That wouldn’t be easy. This was because it wouldn’t be easy to find skilled and, more importantly, trustworthy hunters.

That was why he had entrusted ‘Eye of Jeremiah’ to Kargos. However, regardless of whether it was 10 seconds or 10 minutes, it was an absolutely insufficient amount of time to be able to come to an understanding about an unfamiliar person’s character. No matter whether you’re able to read that person’s surface level thoughts or not.

‘It would really be great if I could meet someone I knew.’

What immediately came to mind were the trustworthy people from the previous final 10; Hildebrandt and Mustafa. He would readily give them two positions. Since a tank position and a magician position still needed to be filled, it would be just perfect if those two came.

Sungjin had Nada, Mahadas, and Baltren, who had not contributed white coins yet, kiss the ring once dinner was over.

Since he had used two Holy Waters after earning three previously

from the 'Red Dragon's Lair', he now only had one remaining. If he used the White Coins he received from them to buy a Holy Water, then he would have exactly four.

Four Holy Waters to prepare the new final 10 people. The three hunters were surprised by the 10% penalty to future raid rewards but did not particularly refuse.

"I'll do it. Since the others did it, I can't be the only one who didn't."

"Well... If it's for the team, then I'll gladly do what I have to do."

"Amitabha."

As they were all 'Chosen Ones', like Franz, they thought of it as something like a tax to gain the increased stats. After dinner was over, the hunters dispersed and returned to their own dimension.

Now by himself, Sungjin returned to the bedroom after collecting the sales receipt from the mail man. The amount he had received from the sales was roughly 70,000 Black Coins. Though the selling price of each item had increased, there were a lot of items that failed to sell. Especially the heroic tier items, 'Swift Paw' included, did not sell well.

'As I thought.'

However, it wasn't a particularly large blow, since most of the Black Coins that he earned were used to purchase Elixirs.

Even if it turned out that he earned fewer Black Coins, if you considered the stat bonus from 'Lathion – Star of Solitude' then it would be as if there was no effect from earning fewer Black Coins.

'Well, getting upgrades from Kargos should pretty much be covered from the raid reward distribution... If there's still a place that's worth using Black Coins on...'

It would be for learning Class 9 Spells, other than the Blue Magic 'Time Reversal'. However, the prices of Class 9 Spells were too

high that Sungjin would have to save for about two chapters if he wanted to buy them.

‘Compared to spending over 100,000 Black Coins in order to learn them, it’s better to just buy Elixirs and drink it. That way, it can also be of help to the other hunters.’

This was how Sungjin felt. From the beginning, he could not use class 9 spells without activating ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ anyway. It was a better use of his resources to stick with and get more proficient at using ‘Time Reversal’.

*

Again, it was four thirty at dawn. Sungjin placed three White Coins on the table and said curtly,

“Three Holy Waters.”

The Merchant of Darker than Black placed them into his vest and in turn took out three vials of Holy Waters. Sungjin wordlessly placed them into his Cube. At that time, the Merchant said,

“For some reason, it feels like you’ve gotten less wordy.”

Sungjin replied coolly,

“No news is good news. Recharge the Trollseeker Marbles... and I’ll exchange the remainder of my coins for Elixirs.”

The Merchant recharged the Trollseeker Marbles and accordingly took out an appropriate amount of Elixirs for the coins Sungjin had left and placed it in front of Sungjin. Sungjin gathered the marbles and downed the Elixir in one go. Meanwhile, the merchant asked,

“How are you these days? If you’re that strong, then raids should be easy now, right?”

“Well... Yeah.”

“Kuku, I see.”

Sungjin was about to get up from his seat having finished all of his business. However, all of a sudden, a question came to mind.

“By the way, is there anyone that comes to this place besides me?”

“Someone that comes to this place?”

“Yeah. Another hunter. For example...”

As Sungjin’s words trailed off, the Merchant’s figure changed. Blonde hair and blue eyes. The figure of the beautiful youth, Edward.

“Are you talking about this person?”

Sungjin creased his forehead and said,

“Yeah. That person.”

Chapter 144 – Black Market Twelfth Shopping (2)

The Merchant whose figure had changed into Edward looked up at Sungjin and grinned before saying, “That... I’ll tell you if you give me 10,000 Black Coins.”

Sungjin glared at him. He had just used all of his Black Coins to buy Elixirs. The Merchant deliberately said it in that manner while knowing this.

‘What a git.’

Sungjin left him alone and got up from his seat. The Merchant returned to his normal figure and said to Sungjin, “If you gather ten thousand next time...”

However, Sungjin didn’t finish hearing what he had to say and left the place.

‘Creak. Creak. Creak’

After passing through the worn down stairs and returning to the Black Market, Sungjin began to walk towards Kargos’s smithy. He pulled his clothes closer to shield himself from the cold night air and looked back towards the shop.

As always, Darker than Black was covered in complete darkness. Sungjin briefly glanced at it. The stores in the Black Market begin to close roughly around nine at night, and by midnight none of them remained open.

Unless you were a truly strange person, there wouldn’t be anyone who would come to the Black Market at four thirty in the morning, when everything was closed, and think of heading into that murky place.

‘That’s almost... No, it’s completely impossible.’

Four thirty in the morning. Not only is it a late time, but it’s also

a time where there are only four and a half hours left until the start of the raid. There wouldn't be anyone who would wander around this place with the life threatening raid in front of them. Even if you just couldn't fall asleep, it would be irrational to come to this isolated place and think of going into that shabby store.

‘In fact... It should only be possible if you receive that message from Ariane...’

The one who had let him know of the store's location was none other than Edward, who had told them while they were resting during the raid before their last. He had said, ‘It was there. It even sold items that lets you cross into other dimensions.’

If Edward knew about the store's location, it meant that he had passed Ariane's test.

‘Even I had barely passed...’

However, Edward was an incredibly strong person. When Sungjin thought about it, ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ had originally been Edward's, and if Edward had challenged Ariane while putting his life on the line, then it might have been possible.

‘Then this time... Could he have...’

He wasn't certain. In any case, Sungjin couldn't be sure of how far Edward had grown because raids were something that was based on your luck with allies. No, it's also possible that he had died a while ago in some chapter.

Luck was like that. A bad result could occur no matter how hard you try, or it could be just the opposite, where a good result could occur no matter how badly you performed.

‘Judging by that guy's skill... it's likely that he's still alive...’

Sungjin thought as he continued to walk. Without realizing it, he had already arrived at Kargos's smithy.

‘Clang. Clang. Clang.’

Sungjin wordlessly watched Kargos who was smelting the sword. He didn't feel the time pass by as he watched the sparks fly from Kargos's hammer.

Sungjin was mesmerized, it was as if he was watching a work of art. Some time later, Kargos wiped away his sweat and said, "It's finished."

The luster of the upgraded Ariane was clearer, and the edge was sharper. Kargos handed it to Sungjin who examined it upon receiving the item.

[Ariane – Dragon Lady](#)

Unique Legendary Katana – Strength SS Dexterity S Magic Power B

Active Skill

Mana Flow (III) – Provides half of the mana used for the next 30 seconds. Depending on the size of the Dragon's Heart, there is a limit to mana provided.

Passive Skill

Mana Respiration (III) – The Dragon's Heart and the user restores 3% mana per minute.

Note: Author updated some item descriptions recently one of which is K's sword Ariane. The sword before granted 1% mana restore per second, this has been updated to 1% per minute instead. So with the current upgrade it's now 3% per minute. Other items if updated in raws will also be updated in the chapters here as well.

Sungjin quickly confirmed the changes.

'Strength and Dexterity rose by one rank... Magic Power is the same... The Active and Passive Skills both rose in rank... The duration of Mana Flow grew longer, and the recovery of Respiration has increased.'

First, the stats had increased by a lot. They were now high

enough that Ariane could now be used by him normally as a sword. The increase in the duration of the skill Mana Flow was also a nice welcome.

Now, since the duration of the skill was the same as the 'Ring of the Great Sage', he could continuously use enhanced magic during that time.

Unfortunately, the amount of mana provided did not increase so he would need more mana to sustain spells for its full duration.

'As ever, mana is the problem.'

While Sungjin was thinking such,

"Here, take this"

Kargos called Sungjin. When Sungjin turned to look, he saw his earring on top of Kargos's hand.

'Ah... Right.'

Trite. The earring that listened to the surface level thoughts of others. Sungjin received the item and looked at it.

Trite – Eye of Jeremiah

Legendary Earring

Active Skill

Legilimency(III) – Read the surface level thoughts of the person you are conversing with.

Activated by touching the earring. 30 seconds duration once the conversation begins. Cooldown 10 minutes.

True Vision(III) – See invisible enemies. Duration 1 minute. Cooldown 10 minutes.

Truth can only shine when lies are stripped away.

A true wizard must be able to wait for the right era.

'Oh...'

It had gained an Active Skill. It was good because he had run across two opponents in the last two raids who had the ability to go invisible. The somewhat short duration of Legilimency had also increased so that now he could read the surface thoughts of others for 30 seconds.

‘It turned out great.’

Sungjin put on the earring again and expressed his thanks to Kargos.

“Thank you, Kargos.”

Kargos placidly nodded his head.

“Now all of your swords became Unique Legendary.”

“Yes, well... So they did.”

“If by chance you gather 9 more Enhancement Stones, I’ll demonstrate my ability once more. Though, I don’t know if that’s possible.”

Upon hearing this, Sungjin tilted his head and said, “That... Are you saying that it’s possible to go even higher from Unique Legendary?”

“That’s right. There’s a tier above that. Mythological tier items. Well, even with the swords you have now can be considered on the level of national treasures. But just in case, if you need it, I can do it. Though it won’t be easy gathering the Enhancement Stones.”

Sungjin heard those words and briefly thought about it, ‘Mythological items...’

He bid farewell to Kargos.

“... I understand. Then, until next time.”

“Farewell.”

On the way back to ‘Ninety Nine Nights,’ Kargos’s words were stuck in Sungjin’s mind.

‘I was planning to upgrade an accessory or armor if I got an Enhancement Stone, but now...’

Mythological tier. Of the items he had seen until now, only one had been a Mythological tier item. The Holy Water of Baptism. However that wasn’t an equipment, but a consumable item. He had never heard of nor seen a Mythological tier equipment.

Sungjin looked down at his swords. Moon Specter, Blood Vengeance, Artemio, and Ariane. When he had upgraded to Unique Legendary, he had thought ‘this much is enough.’ Now that it was said that there’s something above that, he kind of wanted to have it.

‘But gathering 9 Enhancement Stones... Is that possible?’

You would get 1 Enhancement Stone, maybe 2 if you were lucky, per raid. To actually gather 9 Enhancement Stones would be difficult.

‘...For now, I should just keep in mind that such a thing exists.’

Sungjin thought as he returned to ‘Ninety Nine Nights.’ Having returned to the bedroom, Sungjin picked up the ‘Information Sheet’ sitting on the table and a pen as he laid down on the bed. This was in order to do well in today’s morning ‘briefing’. He was trying to remember as much as possible.

‘Back then... What was it like...’

A raid that he had already experienced once. He was the only person who could share his experience. Sungjin wrote various things on the information sheet.

‘Things to watch out for’

‘Strategies for the boss’

‘How to find the hidden boss’

In this manner, he finished turning the ‘information sheet’ into a strategic guide in time for breakfast. He then took the information

sheet and went down to the 1st floor. When it was time to start, he took out the Sceptre of the Warlord, “Draft”

and called all of the ‘Chosen Ones’.

“Hello.”

“Good morning.”

Now there were 5 ‘Chosen Ones’. With Sungjin included, it was now a group of 6. They each gave their orders for breakfast to Dalupin.

“Croissant and some butter please.”

“Kimchi fried rice for me.”

“Chocolate muffin and coffee.”

“Hmm, I’m fine with cereal and milk.”

The table at ‘Ninety Nine Nights’ where Sungjin had always quietly and solitarily eaten at became quite boisterous.

“Unni, have you tried on the mask?”

“Ah, yeah I tried that, but I couldn’t use it because seeing my changed appearance was too awkward. So I just go around with my face.”

“Eh? Then wouldn’t some bad guys try to attack you? Have you not gone through such an experience, Unni?”

“Hrm... I haven’t seen anyone like that.”

“Really? There’s no way they would just leave a nice body like yours alone...”

“Who knows. Maybe it’s because I pull a few corpses around with me.”

It seemed that Serin and Nada became quite friendly with each other. They also did frequently talk with each other while leaving the men alone.

“You said that you’re from Canada? Where did you live?”

“In Ontario.”

“Ah, I see. I lived in New York state.”

“If it’s New York, then I went there frequently.”

“Ah, did you?”

Baltren and Mahadas were both from North America so they exchanged words about their hometown.

“Mister Kei, from where have you learned your sword techniques?”

“Ah... Well, long ago when I was young. I did some kendo. By chance.”

“By chance?”

“Yeah. I had a part time job near a kendo school, and somehow I had a fight with someone who attended the kendo school.”

“Why so?”

“Well, it wasn’t really anything. In a cramped space I accidentally bumped into him, but he started acting all cocky and wanted to pick a fight with me, asking me if I was blind and if I couldn’t see that he had a wooden sword.”

“And then?”

“I was just going to overlook it, but since I ignored him, he actually started charging at me with the wooden sword. So I snatched his sword and hit him on the head with it, but the instructor saw that. And then he told me that I seemed to have a talent for sword techniques. And then, well... I began to study there.”

“Oh, I see.”

Because both Sungjin and Franz were swordsmen, the two had something to talk about. After they chattered and finished

breakfast, the time for Sungjin's important briefing came.

“Eh, then I'll start today's briefing.”

The hunters who were chatting away quieted down when Sungjin began to speak. Sungjin held up the Information Sheet and said, “Today's raid is The Swamp of Kh'rot. Here, Kh'rot is the name of the Lizardman King, who is the boss monster. It's the same as Ahenna who had previously appeared in Ahenna's Forest. Most of the monsters are lizardmen, but these guys have far better teamwork than the orcs, and they're very agile. They also move quickly in the swamp. That's why you have to attempt to fight on dry land whenever possible.”

It felt kind of awkward to receive the focus of the others like this as Sungjin had experienced only difficulties due to being born into poverty. As he felt the attention that was focused on him, he thought, ‘It's as if I have become an instructor.’

Chapter 145 – The Swamp Of Kh’rot

‘Tat-tat-tat’

Sungjin traversed through the water so fast that he appeared to be running upon it.

“Intruder!”

“It’s a warm-blooded creature!”

Dozens of lizardmen chased after Sungjin. Muddy water splashed onto his body. Amidst all this, the operator’s voice could be heard.

[Warning! Boss monster]

[King of Lizardmen ‘Kh’rot’ has appeared!]

As he heard that, Sungjin thought,

‘They’ve taken the bait.’

Sungjin took a look behind him; there were dozens, no, hundreds of lizardmen. Their numbers did not fall short to that of a battalion. After he checked their numbers out, Sungjin took out the egg of Rajenta from his pocket and threw it high into the air.

“Kya~n!”

Rajenta took to the air upon being summoned. Sungjin shouted at him,

“Pick me up Rajenta.”

Rajenta quickly glanced down and then lifted Sungjin up into the sky by his shoulders. Sungjin spoke to him while ascending,

“Higher. Fly higher.”

“Kyan~”

Rajenta flew up higher into the sky while tightly holding onto Sungjin. Each of the lizardmen that had been chasing Sungjin dropped their shields and nocked arrows onto their bows. But

before they could fire at him, Sungjin, who was in the sky, chanted a spell together with Besgoro.

“All-freezing winds! Razor sharp ice!”

“All-freezing winds! Razor sharp ice!”

“Blizzard Storm!”

“Blizzard Storm!”

The lizardmen launched their arrows at him,

‘Ping! Ping! Ping!’

But before they could reach Sungjin, an enormous blizzard storm appeared in the sky. Even without using the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’, Sungjin’s spells were now quite strong. Thanks to that, the arrows aimed at Sungjin were blown away by the storm and did not reach him.

The lizardmen brought their arrows towards their bowstrings once more, but their bodies were already slowly becoming sluggish. This was because their bodies had become wet while chasing Sungjin across the swamp.

By the time the ice hurricane had disappeared, they were already frozen to the point of immobility. Upon seeing this Sungjin said while looking up,

“Rajenta, let me down.”

Rajenta descended and let Sungjin down, and then shook his body once. He must have felt the cold as well.

“Haha. Sorry, sorry.”

In front of Sungjin, there were dozens of lizardmen. More accurately, lizardmen who couldn’t move because they were frozen.

“I just wanted to deal with all of you at the same time. You come out too, Cain.”

Sungjin took out Cain's wooden statue and threw it into the air. Soon the gigantic wolf popped out.

"Cain, bring out your comrades and rip their throats out. They probably won't be able to move properly because they're frozen."

"Woof woof"

Cain answered in the affirmative by barking twice. And then,

"Awhooooo~"

Called out his comrades. Sungjin hunted the frozen lizardmen together with Cain and his pack.

Although they saw Sungjin's blade and Cain's fangs cutting their bodies, they could only move their eyes as they were unable to react.

There were ones that slowly raised their shields, but at that level it was impossible to react to the speed of Sungjin and the wolf packs. He continued to slash their necks without mercy and thought,

'It was true...'

The one that had taught him this strategy was one of his old comrades, Araujo. A Brazilian professor. Upon hearing someone saying that this chapter was difficult, he explained.

'Ah, that chapter? The lizardmen's swamp. That one is easy if you use ice magic. Those guys are unable to warm themselves when their body temperature drops, so if you use freezing magic, it takes a long time for them to be able to move again. Despite their humanoid shape, their body is largely reptilian in nature.'

And as he had said, these lizardmen couldn't move properly when their body temperature decreased. Additionally, these lizardmen had a very strong sense of camaraderie.

If one were to be killed, ten would come, and if ten were to be killed, a hundred would come chasing. Sungjin took into account

the physical and mental traits of theirs, and as soon as the raid started, he beheaded a lizardman and charged into the enemy territory while holding the head until he arrived at the center of the hamlet where the boss monster 'Kh'rot' resided.

As he had predicted, over a hundred lizardmen began to follow Sungjin, until even the boss monster 'Kh'rot' started to chase him.

After he had checked that, Sungjin gathered them in one place and used freeze magic to freeze them all at once. Normally, they had swift movements, tough skin, powerful tails and the ability to work together.

If you fought against them fairly, the lizardmen were difficult to deal with, but after you froze them once, they couldn't even raise their shields properly. The frozen lizardmen,

“Rawr!”

Were helpless against Cain and his pack's attack. They were slashed and ripped apart by claws and fangs. The Lizardmen collapsed where they stood, bleeding profusely. However, amongst that,

“Kii!”

The screams of one or two wolves could be heard. Sungjin turned his head towards that direction. In that spot stood the lizardmen king 'Kh'rot', who was one and half times larger than an ordinary lizardman. Despite being slowed down a great deal, he was repelling the approaching wolves with his scimitar and his golden shield.

‘You’re saying a boss won’t go down that easily, eh?’

Sungjin ran towards him. Kh'rot who saw a hunter appear among the wolves shouted in rage,

“It’s you! The one who made this mess!”

Although he shouted, but that was all he could do. He was

someone that could barely land a hit on Sungjin even at full strength. With a slowed body that was frozen, he was no match for the hunter. The arm holding the scimitar went flying, the gleaming golden shield was cracked in half, and the tail that swung in a last-ditch effort was cut off.

“Sorry. I don’t have much time.”

Sungjin threw a half-hearted apology at him, and cut his throat.

[Boss monster ‘Kh’rot’ Cleared]

The lizardmen upon losing their king also lost their will to fight and turned to flee. However, the swamp which was their homeland was already frozen solid.

Sungjin and the wolves dealt with the lizardmen while sliding on the ice. After he had disposed of all the lizardmen and the master of the swamp,

“Rajenta.”

Sungjin once again called Rajenta and mounted him. From high up in the sky, the swamp of Kh’rot was fully visible. Looking down upon the ground from the air, Sungjin thought,

‘Hmm. The ones that are left are...’

But suddenly,

“Kragh kragh”

From far away, winged beasts that made noises as if spitting phlegm appeared. They looked like small dragons, but they were wyrms, which had longer necks and slimmer tails. Wyverns.

Sungjin remembered having a hard time with these before as he had no way to fly. There was a total of five wyverns. When they got close, Sungjin patted the back of Rajenta’s neck and said,

“Rajenta, when they get close, can you fly just a little higher than those guys?”

“Kyan~”

Rajenta replied with something that could not be distinguished from an affirmation or a refusal. Sungjin balanced himself and stood up on top of Rajenta. And then

“Operator, get me the carpet.”

He pulled out the flying carpet and laid it in midair. The carpet flew behind Sungjin and Rajenta. Sungjin quickly glanced at it and took out his Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance.

Right before Rajenta was about to clash with a wyvern, he jumped up high and got onto the back of another wyvern. The wyvern seemed to be taken aback when its enemy got on his back. Sungjin did not miss that chance and stabbed Moon Specter into its back.

‘Twitch’

The wyvern convulsed violently and tried to skewer Sungjin with its tail. It was a tail that had lethal poison in it. But Sungjin was not someone who would let it hit him. He swung his sword to cut off the tail.

“Kwaaaaa!”

The wyvern that had its tail cut desperately shook its body once more. Sungjin twisted the Moon Specter that he had thrust into its body and stirred the inside. The wyvern once again struggled due to the intense pain, then started to fall slowly.

‘It’s over.’

Sungjin jumped into the air after pulling out his sword. The magic carpet then quickly flew over to carry Sungjin. Up in the sky, Rajenta was fighting with the wyverns. Slashing with his talons and pecking with his beak. From on top of the magic carpet Sungjin,

“Pa”

Shot out Moon Specter.

‘Stab’

The wyvern that was penetrated by Moon Specter lost strength in its wings and dropped to the ground.

“Haa”

Sungjin, who retrieved his sword, held it in his hand and hunted the other wyverns. He cut off the tails swung at him and fed the head that came to bite with a blade instead of his flesh.

After a minute, the battle ended with Rajenta biting the neck of the last wyvern at the same time as Sungjin stabbing it in the back.

In its last moments, the wyvern spun around to try to shake off Sungjin who was on its back, but Sungjin again jumped up into the air.

The magic carpet that had been hovering above him and Rajenta who was flying below it, both flew over quickly to support him. Because of this, it looked as if Sungjin was riding on top of Rajenta while covered by the magic carpet. Sungjin hugged both Rajenta and the magic carpet and said,

“As expected, you guys are better than hunters.”

The magic carpet was silent, but Rajenta,

“Kya~”

Chirped. As Sungjin was flying like that,

[Please return to the hunting grounds.]

[This area is off limits to hunters.]

The Operator’s warning reverberated.

[If you remain in the restricted area after 10 seconds,]

[You will die. 10, 9,...]

Sungjin hurriedly patted the back of the bird’s neck.

“Whoa, whoa, let’s head back Rajenta.”

As if he also had felt an ominous premonition, Rajenta was already heading back even before Sungjin had spoken. Sungjin, who had now returned to the safe zone, observed the swamp area as he flew.

‘So this is the boundary. Then the hidden boss...’

A swamp bigger than the rest entered his sight. Sungjin spoke into Rajenta’s ear

“Rajenta over there.”

The bird soon carried Sungjin to the edge of that swamp.

“Good work.”

Sungjin caressed Rajenta’s head once and asked the Operator.

“Operator. How much time has passed until now?”

[7 minutes and 22 seconds.]

Besgoro spoke up.

‘It really didn’t take long.’

“Yeah, but I was thinking of finishing it quickly and then visiting the other hunters.”

‘The Chosen Ones? Wouldn’t they be doing fine now?’

“Well, more than that, I wanted to look for more people to choose. After I finish early, I was going to visit the other chosen ones’ party and interview the ones that seem okay. Well, though it’s a forced interview.”

‘Ah. So that’s why.’

Although entering the raid alone was great and he didn’t have to worry about anyone, the opportunity to observe other hunters disappeared. At this point in time where the number of hunters was slowly decreasing, there were still four empty spots left.

After a few chapters, he might really have to pick the ‘Chosen Ones’ from limited numbers. Furthermore, as the number of choices decreased, the risks of choosing the wrong person also increased. Sungjin wanted to meet as many people as possible in order to avoid that.

“Frostbite.”

Sungjin shot out a freezing air from his outstretched hand. Soon, the swamp his hand pointed at became frozen and turned into a path of ice. Sungjin headed towards the center of the swamp on the trail he had made.

Chapter 146 – The Swamp Of Kh'rot (2)

Having arrived at the center of the swamp, Sungjin examined his surroundings while standing on top of the ice. Inside the murky water of the swamp, there was something shining with a green light.

‘There it is.’

Having confirmed this, Sungjin

“Hoooo~”

Took a deep breath and dived into the swamp.

‘Splash’

The swamp was just wide, and not very deep. Despite the depth being at a level where your feet would barely touch the ground even if you couldn't swim very well, Sungjin had made a pathway into the center area of the swamp, simply because he didn't enjoy the feeling of swimming in it.

The inside of the swamp was filled with unidentifiable fauna and flora. Sungjin wasn't particularly fastidious, but even so, he didn't feel particularly comfortable swimming in this swamp.

‘It feels like I'm going to catch some disease.’

Thought Sungjin, as he dove towards the bottom. He opened his eyes briefly and saw an object shining brightly with a green light in the middle of the swamp. After Sungjin picked it up, he quickly climbed to the surface of the water. The Operator's voice could be heard saying,

[Congratulations! You have obtained the Hidden Piece]

[Shanok – Emerald Snake]

Once he heard this, Sungjin shouted,

“Rajenta! Could you please pull me out?”

Upon hearing his master's words, Rajenta swallowed down the water snake that he had been holding in his beak, which he had hunted near the swamp while waiting, and flapped his wings. He flew to Sungjin and pulled him out of the swamp by carrying him into the air by the shoulder.

“Put me down somewhere close to there. Somewhere near it.”

Rajenta faithfully obeyed Sungjin's command. Having returned to the shore, Sungjin shook his body much like a dog would shake its body when wet.

“Kuuuh... The smell.”

However, the peculiar smell did not dissipate easily.

‘Nothing I can do about it.’

Sungjin was more concerned about the item he had brought over than the smell emanating from his body. A snake completely made of emerald. From it, some kind of magical light spilled forth. Sungjin examined the item.

Shanok – Emerald Snake

Rare Gem

A gem hidden in the center of a swamp

The key to calling out an ancient existence.

After checking the item, Sungjin placed it in the cube and mounted Rajenta once more.

“Let's go, back into the sky.”

Rajenta flapped his wings and carried Sungjin up into the air again.

‘Eh... Then the next place is...’

Sungjin looked for the place he had to go next from above. He spotted something white between the mostly green and brown colors of this place. A building covered with moss not far from the

giant swamp.

That place was where the Hidden Boss was located. Rajenta flew like an arrow while he carried Sungjin to that place. After getting down, Sungjin gave one last order to the Summon.

“Rajenta, if you go to the place where the lizardmen were killed, Cain’s pack will be there. Go and search the swamp together for enemies that may have survived and kill them by yourselves. Understood?”

“Kyan”

It went back after giving a short reply. If it’s Rajenta and Cain, the two should be able to clear up any remaining lizardmen or wyvern survivors.

‘Then should I head towards the Hidden Boss?’

Sungjin went inside the building. Unlike the other structures of the swamp, such as the lizardmen’s homes made of woven reed or the wyverns’ nests made of rotting logs, this building was made of white marble.

Even though it was mostly covered with green moss, it still gave off the feeling that in the past, it had been made with great care.

‘Is it some kind of temple...’

Though it’s his second time coming here, he couldn’t tell the purpose of this temple since there was no one and nothing inside. There was only a gigantic circular hole inside.

A hole like the one in which the Persian ambassador had fallen into, in the movie ‘300’. However, the diameter of this hole was far wider. Sungjin took a peek inside. Only deep darkness could be seen within.

‘It still looks creepy.’

Sungjin examined the area with that in mind. There was a small altar near the hole. There was a stone statue of only the body and

tail of a snake at the center of the altar.

“Operator”

Sungjin took out the emerald snake statue that he had previously obtained and placed it on top of the stone statue. The snake’s head and body fit perfectly. The moment the head and the body met,

‘Ping’

The statue suddenly shone and then changed into a living snake. Sungjin looked at the snake with narrowed eyes. This was his second time seeing this, but it was still interesting. The snake flicked its tongue several times,

‘Swish Swish’

Then turned its head and entered the gigantic hole. It was now time to face the boss. Sungjin spoke to Besgoro as he took out ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ from his vest.

“Mister Besgoro. Did you know that if you cut this guy once, another appears?”

‘Hrm? What does?’

At that time, a snake of enormous size came out from inside the hole. An enormous snake that was similar in size to a dragon’s head. However, that wasn’t all.

Another snake, and another snake, and another snake, and another snake appeared. A total of five. Though there are many monsters in the raids, there isn’t another one that looked this unpleasant. The Operator’s voice rang out.

[Warning!]

[The Hidden Boss ‘Ancient Hydra’ has appeared.]

‘Hrk....’

Even the veteran Besgoro who had experienced countless battles on land and sea let out a small groan. Upon hearing his voice,

Sungjin instead asked Moon Specter.

“Start repeatedly counting to 10 after I cut the first one, okay?”

‘Yes.’

Moon Specter listened to Sungjin’s words even without any particular explanation. Sungjin followed this by throwing both the ‘Gourmet’s Monocle’ and the ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’.

“Substitute Reading.”

The ‘Gourmet’s Monocle’ began to read the book.

[\[When he tried to cross the river, an officer of Cao Cao’s army in charge of protecting the river, Qin Qi, stopped them. “What is your name?” “Guan Yu”\]](#)

Note on Romance of the Three Kingdoms:

Guan Yu was the most appropriate person in the Romance of the three kingdoms to call a Heroic warrior 영웅 호걸 (Yuusha Goketsu in Japanese). He was a complete man, With the strength of ten men (His weapon was extraordinarily heavy), a thorough understanding of strategy, godlike patience and tolerance (remember the story with the doctor operating on his arm?), unmatched ethics and morals, and unwavering loyalty.

He was such a man of inspiration that Cao Cao, a man who was obsessed with becoming the hero who will save all of China (Sort of a god complex) saw Guan Yu as his equal as a hero and respected him reverently. Cao Cao is famous for his great treatment of talented individuals, and none is more famous than Cao Cao’s respect for Guan Yu.

Some people, including myself, believe that Cao Cao respected Guan Yu more than even Guan Yu’s sworn brother Liu Bei. When Guan Yu was killed, Cao Cao had the person who brought Guan Yu’s head killed and wore white funeral garb for months in mourning. He lamented Guan Yu’s death for the rest of his life and declared “Liu Bei’s negligence has gotten the hero of the century

killed.” Cao Cao was also the person who officially deified Guan Yu.

The quotation in the chapter is one such account of their interaction.

Liu Bei has betrayed Cao Cao and has escaped to form his own country. But during the great exodus, his slow moving horde of peasants was caught by Cao Cao’s forces. During the Chaos, Guan Yu stayed behind to protect Liu Bei’s many wives and family. Cao Cao accepted Guan Yu’s surrender in return for the safety of Liu Bei’s family’s protection.

Guan Yu, during the time when he had no news of his brother, worked for Cao Cao. Even killing a former ally of Liu Bei to show his loyalty to Cao Cao. Cao Cao showered Guan Yu with gifts and titles, all of which Guan Yu refused except a legendary horse.

So once Guan Yu heard of his brother’s whereabouts, he immediately left. Cao Cao correctly assumed that Guan Yu would not want to leave without farewell so he refused to be visited so Guan Yu waited, but after days, he finally wrote a letter and departed.

Cao Cao was devastated but sent a messenger ahead to allow Guan Yu and all of Liu Bei’s family safe passage.

The quote in MHK is at one of these gates where an officer tries to ask Guan Yu to stay.

‘If it’s Guan Yu, then it’ll be a warrior type...’

The closest snake struck at Sungjin as he thought this.

‘Woosh’

Sungjin avoided this by rolling backwards, and said to Besgoro,

“Mister Besgoro, let’s finish this quickly. Frenzy”

Soon, Sungjin’s vision became slightly red. The ‘Gourmet’s Monocle’ finished reading the book at the same time.

[When he asked, “Do you have a travel permit?”, Guan Yu said, “I do not have such a thing.”]

[Seance of ‘Guan Yu’ activated!]

[Passive Skill – Enhance Attack(III), Swift(III) applied.]

[Active Skill ‘Strike of the Blue Dragon’ is available for use.]

Sungjin’s became much faster having received the power of the general. This time, two snakes simultaneously attacked Sungjin, but they only became offerings for ‘Frenzy’ instead.

Sungjin jumped high and avoided the charge of the snake that had attacked first. The second snake attacked right afterwards, but Sungjin stepped off the first head and once more jumped up.

He then turned once in the air and cut downwards with Moon Specter. The body of the second snake that charged at Sungjin was killed by its own momentum as it ran into Moon Specter.

“Kyaaaah!”

The snake twisted its body and tried to return to the hole while Sungjin was still on top of it.

‘As if I’d let you!’

Sungjin lashed out Moon Specter by swinging it in half a circle and swinging Blood Vengeance at the same time as well. He drew a perfect circle, with Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance each cutting half of the head, slicing it off entirely. Moon Specter began to count 10 seconds.

‘10, 9’

Sungjin moved without taking a moment’s respite as he listened to her voice. He didn’t know how many snakes were inside that black hole, but if a snake died, then another snake would come out after about 10 seconds.

To kill the boss, all five snakes had to be killed at the same time. However, that is possible only when there are five hunters. For

Sungjin who was running the raid alone, he had to kill at least two or three snakes within those 10 seconds in order to finish off this hydra.

‘8, 7’

Sungjin jumped onto the head of the snake that he had first avoided. He stabbed at the snake’s eyes with his two swords using the increased speed from frenzy and then tore up its head. Then, as a matter of course, it collapsed.

‘6, 5’

‘Good! Let’s tear all of these monsters to shreds!’

Sungjin charged at another snake while listening to Besgoro’s voice. However, a different snake spat poison at him from its mouth. Just like a dragon’s breath, a greenish liquid came pouring out.

“Solidify”

Sungjin activated Sael’s mantle in emergency to avoid the poison.

‘Tszzzzzzzzzzzz’

He was safe due to the frozen mantle, but the moss that covered the ground near Sungjin turned black and died in an instant.

‘4, 3’

However, he couldn’t waste time because of this. Sungjin charged towards another snake’s head. It opened its gigantic mouth in an attempt to swallow him whole. He commanded Besgoro,

“Fireball”

And at the same time as a giant mass of flame was forced into the snake’s mouth, Sungjin swung Blood Vengeance and made the creature close its mouth through force.

‘Booom!’

A huge explosion occurred from within the snake.

“Kieeeeeeeee!”

Now there were only two left. However, as this happened, another snake appeared from the black hole. Moon Specter began to count again.

‘10’

Sungjin ran towards the remaining snakes. The durations of ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ and ‘Frenzy’ were not that long. He had to bring things to an end within these 10 seconds. Sungjin charged towards a snake’s head.

He stabbed Blood Vengeance into the tip of the snake’s nose, then stood on its handle and cut up the snake’s head with Moon Specter.

“Kraak!”

During this, a different snake once more attempted to spit out poison, but Sungjin was prepared for it. He quickly shouted,

“Snake’s Serum”

Then continued to swing his sword. Meanwhile, the snake’s head portion of the ring ‘Chimerao’ that was on Sungjin’s finger began to emit a green light. The poison that was flying towards him almost reached the area where he was standing.

A few drops of poison did splatter on to Sungjin, but it was as if he was hit by a light rain and there was no effect. Sungjin jumped high and then cut the snake’s head that spat the poison in half.

“Kyaaaa”

Since its neck was naturally very thick, his slash went through about only halfway before stopping.

‘6, 5’

Moon Specter was counting when Besgoro spoke up.

‘There’s one and a half snakes left.’

“Pa!”

Sungjin shot Blood Vengeance towards the dangling half of the snake's head. He didn't look, but the flying Blood Vengeance completely cut through the remainder of the head. Sungjin held up Moon Specter and ran towards the last snake alive.

‘4, 3’

There were 3 seconds left, but this was enough.

‘It was called ‘Strike of the Blue Dragon’, right? Should I try it out?’

Sungjin recalled the name of the Active Skill that he had heard previously, and shouted it while aiming at the snake.

“Strike of the Blue Dragon!”

After he shouted, the general that had been behind Sungjin quickly swung a gigantic scimitar and shot out a slightly bluish energy towards the snake. That energy easily cut through the head of the last remaining snake.

‘Splat!’

Upon seeing this, Sungjin thought,

‘It’s quite strong... If I knew it was like this, I would have used it earlier.’

Moon Specter was faithfully counting down even though the last snake was dead.

‘2, 1’

Soon, the Operator could be heard.

[Congratulations!]

[Hidden Boss ‘Ancient Hydra’ cleared.]

Chapter 147 – The Swamp Of Kh'rot (3)

Sungjin left behind the dead hydra and walked out of the temple since he didn't want to be in the same space as that kind of monster even if it was dead. When he arrived outside, the Operator could be heard saying,

[Raid 100% complete.]

It seemed that Cain and Rajenta had finished killing all of the monsters outside. Sungjin whistled as he thought,

‘When I return to ‘Ninety Nine Nights’, I should ask Dalupin to give those two a special reward.’

Meanwhile, the Operator continued,

[Beginning reward distribution.]

[Monsters slain. Lizardmen Light Infantry: 30, Lizardmen Infantry: 20, Wyvern...]

Sungjin earned 17,000 each in stat points and Black Coins. They each increased by 2000 compared to last time.

[And now we will distribute the items.]

The items that Sungjin earned were:

[Salleh – Ceremonial Spear]

[Mar'baht – Armor of Nobility]

A spear and a leather armor. Sungjin let out a slight sigh when he saw the items. There was no one who used the spear. The armor looked like it was made from the leather of the lizardmen, but currently, he was using armor made from the scales of a dragon.

[Congratulations! Legendary Item ‘Salleh’ obtained.]

[Congratulations! Legendary Item ‘Mar'baht’ obtained.]

But a Legendary item was still a Legendary item. He should be

able to obtain a good price for them from the auction house. Also, there might be someone on the team that might want the armor. Sungjin gathered them and placed them inside his cube.

[Last but not the least, you will be awarded titles you've earned on this raid.]

[Ancient Hunter – Deal 40% extra damage to enemies with 'Ancient' in their names.]

When Sungjin saw the title, he wondered,

'Ancient? Did something like that appear?'

After some thought, he recalled that there was a boss with 'Ancient' in its name in a later chapter.

'Ah... That's right... Furthermore... There could be more later on as well... Well, there's nothing bad with having it.'

After the raid distribution was finished, the Operator said

[Returning to the Black Market in 5 minutes...]

Sungjin interrupted the Operator as he said,

"Ah Operator. Send me back at the normal time."

The Operator changed her words once she heard Sungjin.

[Early return canceled.]

[Returning to the Hunter's Hall as scheduled in 2 hours and 23 minutes.]

'2 hours and 23 minutes...'

If it was that much, then it was plenty of time to hunt trolls and search for other hunters. For now, Sungjin took out the Trollseeker Marble and tried using it.

"Pursuit of Justice."

It was a bit early, but even then, there could be trolls this early. But, as expected,

[No applicable dimension available].

There wasn't a dimension with a troll yet. This was because Sungjin had finished the raid far too quickly. However, luckily Sungjin had something else he could do.

‘Then should I try inspecting everyone?’

Sungjin took out the ‘Staff of the Warlord’ from the Cube and said,

“Inspection”

Five screens appeared. Sungjin looked through them all at once. It seemed that they were all doing well since all five hunters were alive in each of their parties.

The parties that were progressing a bit faster had already killed the boss and were searching for the hidden boss. Right now, Sungjin was interested in the hunters other than the ‘Chosen Ones’.

Right now there were four empty positions. He wanted to fill all four positions before the third 10 man raid, Chapter 17, arrived. After that, since there wouldn't be many people still alive, it would be difficult to choose someone that he liked.

Sungjin sat and watched them as if he was watching several television screens at the same time. There might be someone outstanding, someone worth recruiting. Perhaps, there might be one of his old teammates. There was one person who stood out.

The man that used spells in Baltren's party. He was an Easterner that shot out rather large fireballs from his hands.

“H'oh... If it's that much...”

Looking at that, it meant that he had some skill. Seeing is believing. Sungjin prepared to go to that dimension. However, suddenly, a thought came to mind.

‘Hrm, but... Wouldn't they act differently?’

That seemed rather likely. If he appeared in person, then the ‘Chosen One’ would be relaxed, while the other hunters would be confused. If he didn’t want to be a variable and observe them properly, then he would have to hide himself. Sungjin chanted a spell.

“Freedom from all prying eyes, Invisibility.”

Sungjin’s body soon became invisible. Sungjin transferred to Baltren’s dimension through ‘Inspection’, and just as he arrived,

[Warning!]

The Boss Monster Kh’rot and his followers appeared. Sungjin rubbed his hands together as he began to watch them.

‘This should be interesting.’

Wearing a golden helmet, Kh’rot said in a dignified voice,

“Warriors! Show those warm-bloods the superiority of the lizardmen!”

His figure was completely different from just a while back when he had died insipidly after becoming a frozen lizard. Finally, the fight started. Sungjin stood away from the battle and did not intervene in any way.

Of course, it wasn’t like he would steal away contribution if he began wielding his sword. Instead, it was because he wanted to observe how the hunters would react.

“Uwooooh!”

Baltren wielded his shield and weapon as he fought at the vanguard. Because he was both recklessly and devotedly engaging in combat in the front, the other hunters could concentrate on attacking.

Sungjin examined the other hunters one by one. There was a black man wielding a spear who attacked with an energetic and impressive stab. There was also a white man holding a sword with

fast and flexible movement.

There was an Eastern man using a bow who was hitting a rather high number of headshots, though not as much as Serin. However, of course, the person who stood out the most was the magician in the rear. He cast a spell on Baltren who was in the front,

“Fire Shield”

And created a wall of fire in front of the lizardmen that were holding bows to make it harder for them to aim.

“Fire Wall”

And held a flame in his hand as he went about burning the lizardmen.

“Fire Blast!”

Not only was the strength of his spells strong, but his utilization was also both proficient and meticulous.

‘He’s pretty smart.’

Since he used fire spells while using the ‘Pyromancer’ title, it seemed that the title was specialized for using fire spells in some way.

Although the core of the team was the ‘Chosen One’, Baltren, the magician’s powerful firepower was the team’s main offensive asset.

‘He’s really good... Yeah.’

Sungjin sat on a hollow log in a nearby dry area with his chin in hand as he watched the magician. However, while he was sitting,

“Kyaa?”

A single lizardman accidentally bumped into the invisible Sungjin. At that moment, Sungjin’s invisibility came undone.

‘Shit.’

Sungjin quickly swung Moon Specter and cut out that

lizardman's throat, and then looked at the other hunters. It was a relief. The hunters were so focused on their own fight that they didn't see Sungjin at all. He quickly used,

“Invisibility”

And returned to being invisible.

‘Whew...’

Sungjin let out a sigh of relief as he began to secretly observe them again.

The fight went smoothly. Thanks to Baltren who saved the hunters each time they had fallen into danger with impressive reaction speed, and the efficiency of the Pyromancer who grilled the lizardmen with incredible fire power, the hunters could sever the neck of the King of Lizardmen, Kh'rot, without much trouble.

[Congratulations.]

The hunters cheered as they heard the Operator's congratulations.

“Yeaah!”

“We did it!”

The ‘Pyromancer’ was happy as he put out the fire he held in his hand. As Sungjin looked at that figure, he thought,

‘I think he has enough skill?’

His participation didn't fall behind even when compared to Baltren. He would be able to use even more impressive magic if he received 20% of Sungjin's stats. Now he had to check his personality.

“Let's first rest here before we continue.”

As the hunters each found their own place to take a rest at Baltren's words, Sungjin walked towards them.

“Invisibility”

He chanted the spell again, and soon his figure was exposed. The hunters who had been catching their breath after killing the boss were surprised by Sungjin's sudden appearance.

“What the?”

“Huh?”

The archer actually pulled out an arrow and pulled back his bow string. Although Sungjin could understand the reason, it still did not feel pleasant to have an arrow pointed at him. He slightly looked at the archer as he said,

“If you let that go, you'll die.”

Even after Sungjin spoke, the archer kept the bow aimed at Sungjin. Meanwhile, having seen Sungjin, Baltren flusteredly spoke up.

“Ah... Put down the arrow; he's not an enemy.”

At that, the archer finally took the arrow off the bowstring. Baltren continued and asked,

“Master Hunter, why did you...”

Sungjin clapped his hands as he said,

“Ah, it's nothing special. I just came to hold an interview.”

“An interview?”

“Yes, an interview. An interview to look for potential ‘Chosen Ones’.”

“Ahhh... I see.”

Baltren finally understood the situation and nodded his head. Aside from Baltren, the other hunters were still dumbfounded. Sungjin abruptly approached the Pyromancer and thrust his hand out at him as he spoke,

“Hello there?”

The Pyromancer looked up at Sungjin as he bewilderedly shook

hands.

“Ah... Hello.”

“It might be confusing... But I’ll now conduct a test of sorts.”

“What do you... A test?”

“Hrm... Should we say it’s a kind of test where it would be really good for you if you can pass? Isn’t that so, Baltren?”

When Sungjin looked at Baltren who was standing next to him, Baltren silently nodded his head twice. Sungjin continued,

“From now on, I’m going to ask you a few things. Will you answer them honestly and truthfully?”

The guy looked him and Baltren before saying,

“...Yes”

Sungjin stealthily touched his newly upgraded Legendary earring, ‘Trite’, as he asked,

“What’s your age, name, and country of birth?”

“23. TaeSeuk Cha. I’m Korean.”

“Aaah, I see.”

Besides Serin Han, it had been a while since he had seen another Korean person. Soon, his inner thoughts could be heard.

‘But why is he asking something like this? And what’s so good about it?’

Sungin threw a few more of the questions that he had thought up at night.

“Have you ever become a troll in the past?”

“No.”

‘Of course not. What are you going to do if you do something like that and then receive a counter attack from the other hunters?’

His response was unclear. Instead of being ‘You shouldn’t troll’

in principle', he was of the position 'It's dangerous so I won't do it.' Sungjin slightly changed his question.

"Hrm, then... During a raid... Has there ever been a time, where you've purposefully driven another hunter towards death in order to increase your own rewards during reward distribution?"

He listened to Sungjin's question, then said,

"...There wasn't?"

His way of speaking wasn't all that polite, and his thoughts weren't any better.

'Huh... Was there something like that?'

The answer was ambiguous again. There were people who convinced themselves of their own lies when they felt guilty after doing a bad deed. In some cases, they might be more dangerous than an evil person.

'I don't think this guy will work out.'

Sungjin licked his lips once, then tried to think of another question.

Chapter 148 – The Swamp Of Kh'rot (4)

Sungjin was about to ask the Pyromancer some more questions, but then the Pyromancer's voice could be heard saying, 'Just who is this guy? Why is he asking these kinds of questions after appearing out of nowhere?'

Sungjin purposefully stopped the questions and gave the Pyromancer the time to think to himself. The Pyromancer looked between Sungjin and Baltren.

'Chosen One'... I heard them say something about interviews... That 'Chosen One's' stats are definitely incredible. It might be a really good buff... Is this person the one who chooses? Then I should try to look good.'

Having listened up to there, Sungjin asked him, "Amongst what has occurred in the raids so far, what do you regret the most?"

In response to Sungjin's question, the Pyromancer's real answer could be heard first.

'Accidentally wasting 2000 Black Coins in the Auction House.'

However, his eyes darted before he answered,

"Ah... Well... Previously, I couldn't protect my teammates."

He could suddenly hear the man quickly think.

'I should try to impress him. Though I don't know what being 'Chosen' really means, it seems like a good thing.'

Sungjin grinned as he asked,

"You couldn't protect them? How?"

"Ah... In the past... In that Ice Witch's Frozen Palace, my teammates were being frozen by the witch's attacks..."

Sungjin was listening to his story without saying a word.

'If I exaggerate a bit here...'

His surface thoughts could be heard first.

“Since I didn’t use my spells properly... They froze to death. I didn’t do it purposefully, but it was because of me that my teammates died... Of the things that happened in the raids, that’s what I regret most.”

“Ah... Is that so. I understand...”

Sungjin turned back from there. Starting from the Pyromancer, the other hunters’ eyes began to focus on Sungjin. Baltren approached Sungjin and whispered in a small voice.

“What do you think of him?”

Sungjin had already made a decision in his mind, but nonetheless, he asked Baltren for his opinion.

“Baltren, in your mind, what do you think of him?”

“I think his abilities are decent, but... Back then, when he was replying, it felt like he was lying about something. His attitude also changed a bit from what it was at first...”

Perhaps it was because Baltren had originally been a police officer, but as expected it seemed that his senses were not bad. Sungjin didn’t talk about ‘Trite’, but instead said, “I thought something similar.”

“Then...”

Sungjin conclusively said,

“He’s rejected. That guy.”

It didn’t seem like the Pyromancer was someone who was that bad or on the level of someone who would troll, but Sungjin could not bring in someone who lied for his own profit.

“I see.”

Sungjin patted Baltren’s shoulder as he said,

“Good luck for the rest of the raid. If something happens, call

me.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Sungjin took a glimpse backwards. The Pyromancer was observing him from the corner of his eyes. Sungjin said to Baltren, “Well, actually don’t tell him that he failed. Since that might make him nurture a grudge.”

“Of course. Then what would be good to say?”

“Just tell him that if he passes, I’ll come find him after the raid is done. Also, please keep silent on the information regarding the ‘Chosen Ones’.”

“Understood.”

Baltren returned to his original position after listening to Sungjin’s words. As Sungjin watched the back of Baltren’s figure, he once more hid the traces of himself.

“Invisibility.”

Baltren returned to the hunters and said,

“Well, since it seems like you’ve rested enough, let’s go find the hidden piece.”

When Baltren returned, some of the hunters approached him. Likely, they were asking, ‘Who is that person?’

Questions about Sungjin’s identity. As Sungjin watched them, he thought, ‘Well... Baltren will know what to say.’

He moved towards the edge of the swamp, where it was unlikely for the hunters to come.

‘As expected... It’s hard, trying to find someone good with an upstanding character among perfect strangers’

Sungjin briefly considered,

‘Instead of skill... Should I just look at their character?’

However, that could also lead to some problems. The hunters

that he had ‘Chosen’, Serin Han, Nada, Franz, Mahadas, and Baltren, were all people who had incredible skill even without the ‘Chosen One’ title.

Considering that the raids were something that 5 or 10 hunters cooperated together in, if one person’s ability fell behind considerably, then he would stand out considerably.

It could create a sense of inferiority for that hunter and could become a burden for the other hunters. Sungjin shook his head a couple of times.

‘There are still a lot of chances. Since there are still several ten thousand hunters remaining.’

Sungjin held the Trollseeker Marble, when all of a sudden, a thought came to mind.

‘Now that I think of it...’

The cooldown for the Trollseeker Marble was 10 minutes. Also, the cooldown for Trite, the mind-reading earring, was also 10 minutes.

‘If I find and kill the troll within 10 minutes, and search for people using inspection within 10 minutes...’

He should have just about enough time. In any case, there were about 2 hours left. Sungjin used the Trollseeker Marble.

“Pursuit of Justice.”

This time, a troll was found.

[Request for Dimensional transfer has been granted.]

Sungjin left to go hunting trolls.

*

“Shit! Why?! Just why are you doing this?!”

The troll spat out curses towards Sungjin as he ran as if his feet were on fire. However, a phantom horse suddenly appeared out of

nowhere in front of him and blocked his path.

“Heeheeheeheeeeeng!”

“What... What’s this?!”

The troll was surprised by the figure of the half-transparent phantom horse, and unbeknownst to himself, his tirelessly running feet stopped. At that moment, ‘Shlick’

Two swords pierced through his heart. Sungjin pulled out his swords from the troll. He placed the items that had fallen nearby into his cube and asked the Operator for the time.

“Operator, how long did I spend in this dimension?”

[9 minutes and 21 seconds.]

Besgoro spoke up.

‘This took way too long.’

“There’s nothing we can do about it. The boss in this map doesn’t have a designated location and can appear anywhere his subordinates are killed... Furthermore, who knew that the troll would be hiding in the wyvern’s nest.”

‘Hrmph. If I was in my prime, I could have found him in 5 minutes with Shadowrun.’

At Besgoro’s words,

“Heeheeheeheeng~”

The phantom horse, Shadowrun, who was standing next to Sungjin gave out a short cry as if he had understood them. Sungjin simply dismissed his claim.

“Yeah~ Yeah~”

He had to wait 10 minutes to use Inspection anyways.

“Inspection”

Sungjin once more peeked at the figures of the hunters in action.

‘Let’s see... Who seems ok...’

This time, the crossbowman in Franz’s party seemed decent. While Franz’s party was fighting the wyverns, he was turning the wyverns’ necks and heads into a mass of bolts from the rear.

Though he hadn’t particularly stood out when they were previously fighting the lizardmen, it seemed that his skill began to show when they met flying enemies. Sungjin went over to that dimension. There he again used, “Invisibility”

And watched over them from a place where he couldn’t be seen. Of course, the ace was Franz, who was wielding his two-handed sword without rest and cutting through the necks and tails of the wyverns, but the contribution of the man, ‘Slayer’, was not inferior at all in comparison. While he was expertly shooting his crossbow, he even cast spells.

“Force of nature! Restrain the enemy! Entangling Roots!”

Soon, roots welled out of the ground and tied up a wyvern that had briefly descended. The wyvern flapped its wings in surprise, but the tough roots grabbed tightly onto its ankles. At that moment, Franz ran in like lightning and cut out the wyvern’s throat.

‘His teamwork is good.’

Sungjin watched them from close by until they had killed all of the wyverns. After the fighting was over, he showed himself.

“Huh?”

“Who?”

Of course, everyone except for Franz was surprised to see Sungjin this time as well. Sungjin approached the Slayer and held out his hand.

“Hello. Nice to meet you.”

Sungjin found a dry area nearby and sat down heavily. Far away, Franz and his party were walking in the direction of the temple where the Hydra was located. As he watched them, “Haah... Tch”

He smacked his lips once. The ‘Slayer’ that Sungjin had interviewed was located at the rear of the party.

‘Why are you disappointed?’

Sungjin shook his head at Besgoro’s words.

“No, it’s just...”

When Sungjin spoke up, Besgoro strongly interjected.

‘There’s no reason to be dissatisfied. In fact, this is for the better. It’s better to filter out people like that from the beginning. Sticking around those people is just asking for trouble later.’

“I guess you’re right.”

‘Of course. Trust me. I’m someone who lived on the battlefield for dozens of years. Though most of the throats that I cut were those of my opponents, quite a few of them were the throats of my allies.’

“Really?”

‘Of course. You can find all sorts of people in a war. People who steal rations, people who pillage without approval, and even people who flee right before a fight saying they want to live. That kind of person... Is the third case. Someone who considers only his own life when it becomes even remotely dangerous.’

Sungjin nodded his head as he listened to those words.

“You’re probably right.”

The interview with the Slayer hadn’t taken particularly long. Sungjin’s questions and the Slayer’s surface thoughts were as follows.

‘Have you trolled before?’

‘I have not. I don’t feel like accepting the penalty to try it.’

Having been slightly off from the first question, he completely failed during the second question.

‘Have you ever purposefully driven another hunter towards its death?’

‘When I ran away from the Hidden Boss in the Dark Elven City?’

The Hidden Boss of the Dark Elven City. That was none other than the original owner of Artemio, Swordmaster Calian. The Dark Elven Swordsman who even Sungjin had barely won against after fighting with his all.

‘Since our tank was pushed back too much after fighting for just 1 second... I fled first. But none of my teammates were following behind me. I regretted it.’

Sungjin was able to properly confirm his personality thanks to the Slayer making excuses for himself in his mind. Besgoro added, ‘Who doesn’t hold their own lives as important? However, once you start fighting, you should live together or die together with your allies. What should your allies do if you run away by yourself at the crucial moment? There’s no retreat on the battlefield, I’m telling you.’

He was right. In any case, when they reached the latter half, there was no place to run to even if you did run away. If you were to fight, you could only fight together and win, or fight together and die. Sungjin said to Besgoro, “I think what you’re saying is right, Mister Besgoro. No matter how good their skill is, if they’re like that then they can’t become our allies.”

At being complimented after such a long time, Besgoro said in a barely audible voice, ‘I’m telling you it’s Sir.’

After that, Sungjin spent the rest of the time alternating between hunting trolls and inspecting items. While obtaining items by hunting trolls was easy, obtaining allies was quite the opposite. In

the end, Sungjin had to finish the raid after being unable to recruit any allies in this chapter.

[Teleporting to the Black Market in 10 seconds.]

[10, 9]

Sungjin crossed his arms as he listened to the Operator's countdown. He had walked around busily as he teleported to ten different dimensions, but there were no hunters that caught his eye after his difficult inspection.

‘Well... There should be someone in the next raid.’

The next raid was a 10 man raid. This meant that the sample size was twice as large. It was possible that he might meet someone with outstanding talent and a good personality, or an old teammate whom he already knew well.

‘But that place... truly was hell...’

While Sungjin briefly thought about the past, he was teleported to the Black Market.

Chapter 149 – Black Market Thirteenth Shopping

‘Biiing’

Sungjin appeared in the Black Market with the sound. As always, he sat in the cafe drinking coffee as he calculated the prices of the items. However, while he was doing this, [The Chosen One requested your teleportation.]

[Will you accept the request?]

Nada appeared above Sungjin’s cube. For her to be calling now after the raid was over, it meant that she had something she wanted to ask for herself.

“Nada? Do you need something?”

She went straight to her point.

“By chance, did you get an armor from this raid? A Legendary tier leather armor.”

“Ah... I did.”

Sungjin found ‘Mar’baht – Armor of Nobility’ from amidst the pile of items in front of him.

“You’re talking about this, right?”

“Yeah, that. I want that to upgrade it. Don’t put it up on the Auction House and sell it to me.”

“Ahhh, okay.”

Nada brought her hand to her lips and let out a ‘chu’ sound, after which she sent it to Sungjin.

“Thanks. Then, see you at dinner.”

Having suddenly received a kiss, Sungjin raised both his eyebrows. Afterwards, he examined his notes. ‘Leather armor –

Starting bid 8,000 Black Coins, Buyout price 10,000 Black Coins' was written. Sungjin drew a line through it as he said to himself, 'Since I even received a kiss, I should sell it a bit cheaply. About six to seven thousand...'

After a while,

[The Chosen One requested your teleportation.]

[Will you accept the request?]

Someone else also contacted him. This time, it was Franz.

"Yeah?"

"Ah, Mister Kei. There's this helmet I received during this raid. I was wondering if you needed it."

"Really? Which one?"

Franz took out a golden helmet from his cube. It was the golden helmet that the boss of the previous chapter, Kh'rot, had been wearing.

"This is the Legendary tier helmet that I received this time. Take a look."

Franz had the Operator show Sungjin the helmet's specs.

Arakadon – Kh'rot's Helm

Legendary Helmet – Defense 44%

Passive Skill

Magic Defense(III) – Receive 30% reduced damage from all magic spells.

Active Skill

King's Campaign (V) – Summon 10 heavily armed lizardmen. They will protect their master until death.

Hide your fangs and tail below the water.

– King Kh'rot –

It had good specs, as befitting a Legendary tier helmet.

“Ohh... It’s not bad?”

As soon as those words were said, Besgoro instantly replied, saying, ‘Not bad? What’s even good about it? Kei, are you...?’

Franz, unable to hear those words, continued to speak.

“The helmet you’re wearing right now... The appearance is also a bit... So don’t you think this would be better?”

‘That bastard...!!’

Besgoro shouted furiously, but of course, it couldn’t be heard by Franz. Sungjin barely held in his laughter as he said, “Ah... That’s true, but I’ve gotten used to wearing this helmet. Just use it yourself... Or sell it to someone else.”

“Ah, I see. Then, see you soon.”

After Franz disappeared, Sungjin let out the laughter that he had been holding back.

“Puahahaha”

Perhaps Besgoro was angry, but he did not say anything. Sungjin consoled him, “Don’t get too angry, Besgoro. Maybe wearing around a skull didn’t look too good or something.”

Besgoro let out a short snort.

‘Hrmph.’

Sungjin rose up from his seat when he finished going through the items. However, this time, Serin Han’s face showed up above the cube.

“Hey, Oppa.”

*

‘Jararan~ Janjan jarararan~’

Elegant classical music could be heard inside the building. This

was the high-class restaurant 'Brazier's Flame' located at the center of the Black Market. There was a circular table and six chairs at the center of the completely empty restaurant. Soon, one, two 'Chosen Ones' appeared next to Sungjin with a burst of sound.

'Piyun~'

'Piyun~'

The first to appear was Franz. He looked around at the surroundings once.

"Woah... Was there a place like this?"

He only knew that he was still in the Black Market when he looked out the window.

"Ah, here. I only looked at this place from afar, but I had no idea that it was like this from the inside."

Nada was the next to appear. It seemed that she had visited this place before.

"Oh, you chose here? You have good taste, Kei."

Afterwards, Mahadas and Baltren, the two men in their 30's, arrived. It seemed that they did not particularly care about the eating place. Baltren sat in his seat after he glanced at the showy decorations once, while Mahadas didn't even do that and simply sat in his seat while keeping his hands clasped in a prayer. The last to appear was Serin Han. She looked at her surroundings and beamed.

'It'd be great if we had dinner there tonight.'

It had been her suggestion for them to gather here today. She smiled as Sungjin had listened to her request. Once all of the 'Chosen Ones' were gathered, Sungjin placed both of his elbows on the table and asked them, "Everyone, how was the raid?"

"It was hard, but we finished it properly."

"So did I."

“Me too.”

Sungjin raised his hand and then asked,

“Is there anyone who didn’t achieve 100% completion?”

No one at the table raised their hand in response. In other words, everyone had successfully fought against the hidden boss and achieved 100% completion.

The Chosen Ones had now reached the level where they could take the other hunters and carry them, just as Sungjin had done himself previously throughout Chapter 1~10. He then clapped his hands as he said, “Good. Then let’s order and eat together.”

The Hunters each held up the menus that were in front of them and ordered.

“I’ll have the Beef Tenderloin, rare.”

“Rosé Pasta with Crab Meat.”

“Fire-grilled Steak Quesadilla.”

The lion-man that had been waiting a step behind them politely wrote down their orders and went into the kitchen. All of the items that had been ordered could also be made by Dalupin, but the ingredients and cooking methods used in each restaurant were slightly different, so it was possible to enjoy different tastes. This was the reason why Serin Han had requested that they meet here.

Soon, the lion-man brought out their dishes all at once and placed it in front of them.

“Please enjoy your meal.”

Each person held up a knife and fork, or spoon and chopsticks. After they had eaten for a while, Nada spoke up.

“By the way, there wasn’t a new person today?”

Franz also spoke up.

“Indeed. Of the people you interviewed, were there any that you

liked?”

Sungjin crossed his arms and said,

“There weren’t any. Unfortunately.”

At Sungjin’s words, Serin Han interjected, “There will be more chances. Also, since the next raid is a 10 man raid, shouldn’t there be more opportunities to observe even more hunters?”

Sungjin brought his hands together and responded by saying, “That’s correct, but... In truth, this upcoming 10 man raid is a difficult place, where even I can’t guarantee clearing with 100% completion. I’m not sure if there will be time to spare.”

Everyone was slightly surprised by Sungjin’s words. This was because it was the first time that Sungjin had spoken of a raid like that.

“You should receive the information sheet soon, but... The next raid... Is at the Great Plains of Barrastan. What’s special about this place is that... It takes place on a battlefield.”

“Battlefield?”

Sungjin touched his forehead as he said,

“Yeah. A battlefield where the human and demon armies are engaged in combat. The hunters join the human side, and the objective is to defeat the enemy commander. But this isn’t that easy. Not only there are a lot of enemies, but the commander is also surrounded by his subordinate officers... These guys are all difficult to deal with.

“Ehhh...”

“Hrm...”

Sungjin turned towards the hunters and said, “I’ll help as much as I can, but... I don’t know if that will be possible every time. As such, you should mentally prepare yourselves tonight. I’ll try to give you a more detailed briefing tomorrow morning.”

The somewhat nervous hunters nodded their heads to Sungjin's words.

*

Four thirty in the morning. Like always, Sungjin went to Darker than Black.

"Welcome, Master Hunter Kei. You look healthy."

In response to the Merchant's greeting, Sungjin merely placed the used Trollseeker Marbles on the table and said in a dry voice, "Charge the marbles. Operator, pay him."

It seemed that the Merchant was a bit offended by Sungjin's attitude.

"What. If you're going to be like this, then I won't sell, either."

Sungjin stared at him briefly. Soon, the Merchant grinned and said, "Ahh. It's a joke."

The Merchant held the marbles and then placed them back on the table. When he did so, the marbles had regained their color.

"Here, take them."

Sungjin took the marbles, and then said to the Merchant, "Also, about what I asked you last time. That thing."

"Ah, this?"

The Merchant briefly changed into Edward's appearance. Sungjin disliked it but purposefully did not reveal it since it was likely that the Merchant would enjoy it even more if he did.

"Yes. That person. Did he come here?"

At Sungjin's words, the Merchant nodded his head once and said, "That will be ten thousand Black Coins."

Sungjin said without hesitation,

"Pay."

This time around, Sungjin had earned the most profit that was possible from the auctions through the Auction House. He could use ten thousand Black Coins in order to be able to know about that person. After his cube touched the Merchant's cube, the Merchant said, "He came."

"When?"

"If you want to know that, then an extra fee..."

Sungjin wrinkled his brow. Then, the Merchant continued, "Is normally required... But since you're a frequent customer here, I'll give you a special service. The first time he came here... Was after the end of Chapter 10, and the most recent time he came was today at dawn."

"Today at dawn?"

The Merchant replied,

"Yes. Right now, he's still with me. Sitting in the exact chair that you're sitting on right now."

Sungjin got up from where he was sitting and looked at the chair that he had been sitting on. To think that Edward was also sitting in this place.

"What does he buy?"

The Merchant closed his mouth at Sungjin's question.

"That will always be a secret. Even if you gave me a million Black Coins, I wouldn't tell you."

Sungjin didn't ask anything else. This was enough for him to deduce some facts. First, if came here after the end of Chapter 10, then it meant that he passed Ariane's test. And then, if he's here now, then it meant that he was still alive.

"Then, soon..."

Sungjin briefly stood up and thought about Edward. When he saw the Merchant grinning as he looked at him, he said to the

Merchant, “Just give me some elixirs. For the rest of my coins.”

*

The hunters that were gathered in Sungjin’s dimension at breakfast time had somewhat grim expressions. Even the food they ordered, toast and cereal, was a bit modest. It seemed that this was because Sungjin had said, ‘You should mentally prepare yourselves.’

With a grim expression last night. Sungjin thought, ‘... Did I speak too harshly last night?’

But decided to keep this atmosphere. The two who hadn’t been in the party of ‘Chosen Ones’ for too long, Mahadas and Baltren, seemed to feel somewhat less apprehensive, while Serin Han, Franz, and Nada, who had received the buff 5 to 6 chapters ago, seemed to have become somewhat nervous.

Sungjin decided to help them as much as he could until the last moment and stimulated them a bit.

“I said it yesterday, but this chapter is very difficult. There’s no information on the location of the Hidden Piece or the Hidden Boss. So do your best everyone.”

“Understood.”

Sungjin told them every piece of information that he knew. After they had left, he, of course, began to prepare himself mentally. This was because he was proceeding in this 10 man raid by himself.

If he worked with other hunters, then the difficulty would decrease, and there would likely be more chances to search for allies, but problems could arise when distributing the rewards. He did not want to unwittingly commit troll-like actions. Sungjin held up ‘Lathion – Star of Solitude’ and said, “Solitary Training”

[You will proceed alone for the next raid. Difficulty will not be adjusted.]

Shortly after, Sungjin was summoned alone to the Great Plains of Barrastan.

Chapter 150 – Great Plains Of Barrastan

Far away, past the horizon, the sun was setting. The plains were dyed red by the light from the sunset. However, there was oily black smoke rising here and there. At the same time, from somewhere a steady drum beat could be heard reverberating.

‘Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!’

Sungjin had been teleported to a battlefield where smoke could be seen rising in every direction. The Operator’s explanation could be heard.

[Welcome to the Great Plains of Barrastan]

[Once a peaceful, fertile region]

[This place became a battlefield because of the invasion of the demon race.]

[Warning. Having won the battle, the soldiers of the demon race]

[Are looking around for the remnants of the human soldiers.]

Sungjin turned to look at the vast Barrastan Plains. The corpses of humans and demons were scattered throughout the plains near him. There was a demon encampment just ahead.

In truth, this chapter was a bit absurd in that you had to fight against an entire army with just ten people. However, Sungjin was just one tenth of that and had to fight against an army by himself.

Sungjin did indeed have the stats and items that he had gathered until now, but it still wasn’t an easy fight to win. The wind blew softly, bringing a familiar smell that invaded his nose. The smell of burning grain and flesh. Sungjin wrinkled his brow. On the other hand, Besgoro exclaimed excitedly, ‘Mmm~ This is the smell of battlefields.’

Sungjin said to him,

“Mister Besgoro, be more serious. This chapter won’t be easy even for me.”

‘It won’t be easy? Then why did you come by yourself, instead of coming with other hunters?’

“If I did that, then there would be more things to worry about. I wanted to settle things alone.”

‘Didn’t you do it like that because it was possible to do so?’

“It’s possible, but... It’s really not easy to do so.”

‘Ahhh, I get it. Just trust me. I’m someone who forwent marrying and lived in these kinds of battlefields for 40 years.’

‘Instead of not marrying, you couldn’t marry...’

While Sungjin thought this to himself, Moon Specter’s faint voice could be heard.

‘Don’t worry too much, Master. I’ll also help as much as I can.’

Sungjin petted Moon Specter as he said,

“Aaah, yeah. I’ll be relying on you.”

Besgoro interjected,

‘Yeah, yeah. The phantom miss sure is kind hearted.’

At his words, Moon Specter was slightly embarrassed as she replied, ‘No... What are you saying...’

Sungjin pushed out his lower lip as he listened to the conversation of the two. Though he didn’t see the figures of the two phantoms every time, but Besgoro was a grandpa in his late 50’s while Moon Specter was a young lady in her early 20’s.

If it was just that, then it was possible to call it a warm conversation between a grandpa and a young lady, but if you considered Besgoro’s past history, where he had liked Count Dimitri’s daughter, it didn’t paint such a pretty picture. Sungjin ended the conversation between the two, and said, “The fight is

about to begin. Please stop chattering, you two.”

While Moon Specter replied straightforwardly, ‘Yes, Master.’

Besgoro continued quietly,

‘Eh, why, the lady is cute so I was...’

Sungjin briefly recalled the offer Franz had made yesterday.

‘Should I have... just accepted that...’

While Sungjin was thinking that, a hologram appeared from the Operator’s cube.

Great Plains of Barrastan Raid

Objective – Kill Commander ‘Zeratar’.

Time limit: 3 hours 30 minutes.

Sungjin glanced at and confirmed the time limit. Three and a half hours. You could say that it was a long time, but in reality, it wasn’t actually that long since the map was large and there were many enemies.

In any case, it was not long until the beginning of the raid. Sungjin prepared himself mentally. Until now, he had faced various bizarre creatures and had unusual experiences throughout the numerous chapters, but it was here, in the Great Plains of Barrastan, where Sungjin’s most painful memory was born.

‘Sungjin, save me!’

‘Ahhhhhrgh!!!’

It was truly a miracle that he had cleared this last time. The other nine hunters had died, and the chapter had ended when he had killed the boss monster while bleeding.

‘It really was... A hellish experience...’

However, the result was that he had monopolized the reward for

the 10 man raid by himself. It goes without saying that if you monopolize the reward, then there was an unbelievable number of items, Black Coins, and Stat Points.

He hadn't desired it, but it did seem that being able to monopolize the reward in this chapter was likely one of the main reasons why he was one of the last 10 people remaining.

‘Hrm... Is that why everyone...’

Now that he thought about it, there had been a person who thought, ‘If I receive all of the 10 man raid's reward, how much would that be?’

And had wanted to troll in the 10 man raid, Red Dragon's Lair.

‘I should finish quickly, and go troll hunting. I should be able to catch some big shots in this raid. And... If possible, help some other hunters as well.’

Sungjin had this in mind as he swung his swords through the air a few times. In truth, although he had complained, but clearing this chapter shouldn't be that hard.

It was just that the Hidden Boss would be a problem, as it might be on the same level as Ariane. If this was the case and the hidden boss was an existence whose strength was in a different dimension, then he might have to ponder on whether to attempt it.

‘Let's find it first, and think about it then.’

Sungjin kept this in mind as he prepared his swords. After a short time, the countdown began.

[The raid is starting in 10 seconds.]

[10, 9, 8... 3, 2, 1, 0.]

[The raid has begun.]

The formless barrier that had been draped over the plains disappeared in tandem with the Operator's voice. Sungjin began to walk through the plains while holding his two swords. Besgoro

said, 'Aren't you going to catch them in a group like last time? Like that time when you froze the lizardmen all at once.'

Sungjin said in a quiet voice,

"That was possible since it was a 5 man raid. This is a 10 man raid. Even if it's just regular monsters, I can't just fight them like that."

'Is that so? Then I guess you can only fight a guerrilla war.'

"That's right. A lone guerrilla. But... Do you still call a person that exterminates the entire enemy army, a guerrilla?"

'Good question. I don't know.'

However, at that moment, Moon Specter interrupted, 'Master, it's the enemy.'

As soon as Moon Specter finished speaking, a team of demons arrived at the wheat field that Sungjin was in. Sungjin stealthily looked at the demons through the crops. In general, the demons had a large physique.

About 2 meters in height, with bulky bodies, crimson skin, and yellow eyes. In addition, each of them had one, two, or even three white horns on their heads. It was similar to the normal image of a 'demon' that most humans had. If there was something strange, it was that Sungjin could somehow understand what these guys were saying.

"Sniff, sniff. Hrm? Hey, can't you smell the scent of humans coming from over here?"

"Yeah, it's definitely the smell of humans."

There was five in total. Sungjin held his two swords as he waited for the demons to come closer.

"Hey, isn't this the smell of a live one? Is it possible..."

Right when they had come very close to him, he ran at the closest demon and swung Moon Specter.

‘Thunk’

The demon could not even scream and immediately died on the spot.

“Human!”

The second demon saw Sungjin and shouted, but by then Sungjin’s other blade, Blood Vengeance, was already flying towards him.

The demon urgently brought up his weapon and tried to block Sungjin’s sword, but Sungjin’s Blood Vengeance, as befitting of a Unique Legendary, cut through both the demon’s sword and his throat. However, since the demon was able to delay the attack with his sword, he was able to let out his death throes.

“Kuh kuh kuhk!”

Of the five, two had died in an instant. It goes without saying that the remaining three charged Sungjin as well.

Three sharp edges flew in from the left side, the right side, and in front. Sungjin blocked the axe and spear that came in from the sides with his two swords, while he avoided the remaining blade by bending his body backwards.

Afterwards, he tumbled backwards with ease and broke their encirclement. Perhaps because they were ambushed, the demons could not remain calm and recklessly attacked Sungjin. They lined up to attack him as they followed after him. This was no different from suicide.

‘Surrounding didn’t work, but you still come in a line?’

Besgoro’s comment was on the mark. As Sungjin cut the neck and weapon of the first demon approaching him, he rolled slightly and cut the ankle of the second demon. The third demon swung his axe at Sungjin, but he avoided even that by twisting his body.

‘Thud’

The demon's axe only cut a wide swath of land. Sungjin cut the now stuck demon's throat as if he were beheading him. The three demons became powerless in an instant.

“Kuaaaaak!”

The second demon whose ankle was cut, was in pain since he was still alive, but it wouldn't stay like that for long. Sungjin pierced the demon's heart with Blood Vengeance.

“Hooo...”

After he finished the first battle, Sungjin breathed in deeply and then let it out. While doing so, he looked at the corpses of the demons lying on the ground. Originally these demons were hard to fight against even if 10 hunters ran at them. They were that powerful.

They were strong opponents that could cause annihilation if you underestimated them because they were regular monsters. However, now Sungjin was at the level where he could win against them without receiving damage once. Moon Specter, who was usually silent, quietly opened her mouth and said, ‘Master. It feels like your skill has grown compared to before.’

“Really?”

Sungjin looked down at his hands, which were holding his swords. It seemed that not only did his stats grow and his equipment improve, but after experiencing life and death situations several times, his sword techniques had become even stronger.

‘Yeah, even I can tell. You're doing quite well, boy.’

Having listened to the two phantoms, Sungjin regained his confidence. It seemed that he had been daunted by the memory of his team being annihilated the previous time he had been here. He felt that besides the Boss Monster who was the leader of the army and the Hidden Boss whose existence he had no idea of, the normal

monsters would not be able to threaten him very much.

“Good. Then let’s quickly win, and assist the other hunters. And also go hunting trolls.”

Sungjin walked with light footsteps towards the origin of the rising smoke, the demon’s encampment.

*

Ten minutes before Sungjin started a one-man guerilla war. Serin Han, who had transformed into Mustafa, wearing a turban on her head and a shaggy beard, bowed her head as she spoke.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Mustafa. I mainly use the bow. I also know how to use a little magic.”

While Serin Han was introducing herself, the attention of the nine hunters focused on her. As she felt their attention, she touched her earring. Soon, their surface thoughts came flooding towards her.

‘Hrm... Though you can’t trust those guys from the Middle East.’

‘A Chosen One? What a strange title.’

‘Bow? It seems alright.’

‘He shouldn’t be a troll, right?’

Now it was Chapter 14. Having become veterans who had experienced all kinds of battles over mountains and seas, whenever one of the other hunters introduced themselves, each hunter would look and try to figure out if he would be a help to him or the party, or if he was someone who would stab them in the back. Of course, Serin Han was no different.

“I’m Xiao Hai.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Westwood Wolsy.”

However, amongst them, there was one man that stood out.

“A pleasure. I’m Edward.”

A tidy blond hair with white skin, a sharp nose, and blue eyes. A beautiful youth who wouldn't look amiss on a poster. Although Serin wasn't the type to fixate on the appearance of men, his good looks drew her attention. Serin who was staring at his pretty face then raised her gaze to read the title hovering above him. His title was 'Spellmaster.'

'Huh...?'

And at that moment, it finally dawned on her.

'This man... Wasn't he on Sungjin Oppa's list?'

Chapter 151 – Great Plains Of Barrastan (2)

Serin Han looked through her memories for those regarding him.

‘A blonde man, good-looking, Edward, Spellmaster.’

It was exactly the man that was on Sungjin’s list. Unlike the other people on the list, he was someone who was important enough to get a star written next to his name. Sungjin had even made sure to say,

‘You must call me if you meet ‘Spellmaster’ Edward.’

Serin Han stole glimpses at him. He was good-looking and smiled winningly; from his outward appearance, he looked normal.

‘Is that man truly dangerous?’

He did not look dangerous at all from just his physical appearance. Serin decided to call Sungjin after clearing the Boss with Edward first. Sungjin did say,

‘Call me after about 1/5 of the raid time has passed. Since I have to clear my raid as well.’

She kept an eye on him as she held her bow.

‘I should first observe him until it’s time.’

Soon the raid began.

“Everyone. We should slowly go towards where the enemy camp is.”

They began moving while following some hunter’s lead. As the bow wielding Serin and magician Edward were dispatched to the rear, they weren’t particularly far apart from each other.

Serin diagonally moved backwards and stole a peek at him. His flashy items and his good looks were both eye catching.

He had the pointy hat most magicians used, a crimson robe that seemed to have some kind of magical glow, and a staff with three

bluish crystal spheres embedded in it. It seemed that he was using pretty good items. While Serin was examining him, shouts were heard suddenly.

“It’s the enemy!”

“It’s the humans!”

Serin looked towards the source of the voices. Five demons were looking at the hunters while yelling. Even though it was obvious that the hunters had twice their numbers, the demons didn’t seem to be discouraged by it at all.

Instead, they confidentially came charging at the hunters. Serin held up her bow. It was the crystal bow she had earned from Ice Palace in Chapter 11. She had gathered three and turned it into a Unique Legendary – one from Sungjin, one from Nada, and the last from the Auction House.

She nocked an arrow on her bowstring and pulled. She aimed at the head of the demon who was in the very front and then let loose.

‘Pew~’

The arrow flew accurately towards the head of the demon. Serin was certain that she would hit the exact center. Her arrow would definitely pierce through the enemy’s brains. However, the moment the arrow that had been flying on target was about to touch the demon’s head, it bounced off.

‘Tik!’

‘What?’

When the arrow was about to hit, the demon had turned and struck it with the horn growing from his head. Serin was a bit taken aback.

She had seen Boss Monsters or stronger beings knock aside her arrows before, but it was the first time where regular monsters on

the field were able to deflect them.

In any case, the battle began while Serin was flustered. It was a battle to the death between the hunters and demons. But unexpectedly, it seemed that it was the hunters that were being pushed back.

Each of the demons was holding a single weapon – a sword, an axe, a spear, a mace – and while they were each fighting two or more hunters, they were not being pushed back at all.

If it was a 10 vs. 10 instead of 10 vs. 5, then the hunters would have been the ones who were losing their ground. Only 3 seconds after fighting, Serin, as well as the other hunters, realized,

‘Aren’t these guys incredibly strong?’

Even if this was the case, the hunters could not exactly begin running away from the first battle. The hunters began fighting against the demons that were several times stronger than them. Serin, of course, pulled back her bowstring once more. Since the head would be moving ceaselessly in close combat, she instead aimed at the torso instead.

‘Piin! Piin! Piin!’

This time all three had met their mark. The movement of the demons that were hit by Serin’s crystal arrows began to slow. Thanks to this, it was easier for the other hunters to fight the demons. As this happened,

“This annoying pest!”

a demon jumped high into the air and flew straight towards Serin. Serin leaped into the air and chanted,

“Sylphid.”

Soon, her shoes began to shine with a green light and moved her slightly away from the enemy. Serin continued to shoot arrows while she was floating in the air and flying backwards.

One arrow.

‘Piin!’

A second arrow.

‘Piin!’

A third arrow.

‘Piin!’

The demon was significantly slowed after being hit by all three arrows; enough that she could shoot more arrows at him while avoiding the horn on his head. Serin nocked an arrow that would be the final strike and pulled the bowstring. However, at this moment a hunter came flying towards Serin. This was because a demon had grabbed him and threw him at the floating Serin.

“Slyp...”

She tried to use her active skill once more, but it was too late. She collided with the incoming hunter and fell over on the spot.

“Kuu...”

The demon that had been slowed did not miss this opportunity and charged at the two people. Serin tried to get up quickly, but the demon was faster than she thought. When she thought,

‘What do I do?’

The sound of someone chanting a spell could be heard.

“Flames of Purification!”

The moment the demon swung his axe at Serin,

“Fire Blast!”

It became very bright. When Serin came back to her senses and looked, Edward’s blazing staff had pierced the demon’s heart. What was unique was that the flames on the staff had different colors from that of a normal flame and gave off a silver-white light.

Serin now had a reasonable estimate of the opponent's toughness thanks to her arrows. However, even though the demon's physique was incredibly tough, that light would disintegrate the flesh where it touched instead of simply burning it. Having a hole pierced through the area of its heart, the demon fell noisily to the ground.

‘Thud’

Edward held his staff in one hand as he extended the other to Serin.

“Are you okay?”

He pulled Serin up onto her feet when she grabbed his hand. Afterwards, they left towards where the demons were. Serin briefly looked at his back, before coming back to attention and shooting arrows once more.

The hunters that had been on the defensive quickly returned to offensive. While the hunters kept the demons busy, Edward's spells and Serin's arrows inflicted critical blows, and soon the demons died as they bled to their deaths. After the first battle was over, all the hunters took a breather.

“Whew...”

“As expected, a 10 man raid isn't that easy.”

“Indeed. They seemed like a scouting party... For them to be so strong...”

At this moment, Serin stole a glimpse at her savior, Edward. It could have become a dangerous situation, but she had been able to escape the crisis thanks to him.

‘... He seems to be a kind person... Is this person really dangerous...?’

However, while she was stealing glimpses at him, her eyes met Edward's briefly. Serin awkwardly tried to look elsewhere, but at that moment, Edward said,

“For a man, your hands are pretty small.”

Serin slightly fumbled through her words as she said,

“Ah... Yes, they’re... a bit small.”

The mask from the Raccoon Merchant changed your outward appearance, but it did not change your body type as it was related to combat. Although the hand looked bigger than it was, if you actually grabbed it then it would be a bit small. Serin thought to herself,

‘No way... Did he find out?’

While Serin was worrying, one of the hunters said,

“Then, let’s continue.”

All of the hunters headed towards the battlefield again. The second enemy group that they met had two more than the previous team, totaling to seven demons. The hunters were incredibly nervous. It wasn’t easy fighting five of them, and now there were seven. Furthermore, there was a demon among the enemies that was using magic.

“Eternal Flames of Hell! Inferno!”

While someone was surprised and said,

“A normal monster is using magic?”

Edward used a spell to block the enemy’s magic.

“Anti-Magic Shield”

Having seen this, Serin took out an egg from her jacket and threw it into the air.

“Come out, Rin”

A single crimson falcon soon appeared from the egg. The name of the falcon that had just appeared was Rinesh’kha. The falcon that Serin called ‘Rin’ for short was an immense in size whose wingspan measured 3 meters from left to right.

Normally, she took it out for Boss fights and used ‘Arabian Nights’ for Hidden Bosses, but she decided to use it here because Sungjin had said in the morning,

‘In this raid, try to avoid the Hidden Boss if you can. Since the Hidden Boss in the 10 man raid... Might be an existence whose strength is just incomparable. Even I don’t know if I’ll try it... I’m not sure. So, just think that there’s no Hidden Boss in this raid. Okay?’

If they’re not going to fight the Hidden Boss, then she could take out and use ‘Arabian Nights’ for the regular Boss. She stroked the falcon’s beak and said,

“While I’m shooting the arrows, keep off anyone who tries to approach me. Ok?”

“Kyaaak”

Having called Rin to be her guard, Serin began to shoot arrows without worry. The second fight was easier than expected. Part of this was because several of the Hunters had begun to use their Active Skills after feeling a sense of crisis from the first battle.

“High Tower!”

“Exploding fist”

“Heartless Strike”

The other part was because Edward began to throw powerful spells at just the right time.

“Ice Lance!”

“Fire Ring!”

After shooting arrows for a while, Serin began to have a strange feeling. Even before she had become a ‘Chosen One’, excluding when she had first met Sungjin, she had always been the ace of the team.

During the raid distribution, she had never missed being first in

contribution. As they had proceeded into the latter half, the difference in contribution did begin to decrease again, but after she had become a 'Chosen One', her contribution levels had exploded once more. However, she now thought,

'This time, it won't be easy.'

Edward's spells were simply that strong. Regardless of this, she still did not like losing first place. Serin began to focus more while shooting her arrows. On occasion, the demons would team up to try and attack her.

"Kill that Archer bastard first!"

However, Rin would show up each time, clawing their faces and pecking their necks. Serin would use this opportunity to use

"Sylphid"

She kept shooting arrows as she retreated backwards. In this way, even if the demons did manage to come close to Serin, they would die after turning into pincushions. Just when the fight was about to finish, with their victory nearly assured, Serin put away her arrows and observed Edward.

"Lightning Bolt!"

It seemed that he also had a lot of mana. He wasn't exhausted even though he kept using magic.

'This person is really strong.'

Serin thought as she pursed her lips.

'Not only is he strong... But looking from the outside, he looks like a good person.'

If this hunter wasn't one of Sungjin's 'important people', then it was likely that she would recommend him to be their ally. Though, given Sungjin's attitude when talking about him, it looked like there was no possibility of this happening.

'I can't forgive that guy.'

Regardless, Serin proceeded together with Edward to kill the enemies. Sungjin regarded him as ‘the worst’, but Edward seemed to harmonize well with his teammates,

“I’ll cast a spell on you, so please charge forwards.”

And he would be the first to help others.

“Anti-Magic Shield.”

Because of this, Serin felt a bit confused. From her point of view, not only did Sungjin have a lot of experience, but he was also an incredibly cautious person. The judgments that he made during the raids were generally correct. However, she thought that at least his judgment of Edward was somewhat incorrectly made.

‘I don’t know what happened back then, but...’

Serin thought of her earring. The cooldown for the ‘Eye of Jeremiah’ was 10 minutes. She thought that she should investigate as much as she could as the raid progressed.

Chapter 152 – Great Plains Of Barrastan (3)

Sungjin pulled his two swords out of the demon's heart.

“Kweeh”

The demon coughed up black blood along with a short shriek. This was the third scouting party that he had encountered. Sungjin looked around. The enemy's encampment was right in front of his nose. Besgoro muttered,

‘Now it really begins!’

As Besgoro had said, this was where it really began. Sungjin took out ‘L’vain – Mantle of Darkness’ from the Cube. This was the mantle that Illich had used while running away from Sungjin. The outside was honestly as black as the darkness of ‘Darker Than Black’. Sungjin held the item and said,

“Equip”

The black mantle was equipped on his back, and ‘Sael's Breath – Mantle of Freezing’, which had been there earlier, was folded neatly and placed in his hand. Sungjin threw it into the cube and said,

“Then, let's begin.”

After he switched mantles, Sungjin hid his presence and began to walk closer to the demon's encampment. Even though it was in the middle of the day, it was quiet inside the camp.

This was because the demon race were nocturnal by nature, and so their sleep pattern was opposite to that of humans. This had even been noted on the Information Sheet. Because of this, it was considered to be deep in the night for them at the moment, even though the sun was at its zenith.

In the demon's encampment, they were separated into squads. Although the exact reason for this was unclear, it seemed like this

positioning was in response to the human force's siege weapons and magic of mass destruction.

Their opposite sleep pattern, and the slightly separated squad barracks. These two elements were the primary reasons the absolutely outnumbered hunters could clear this chapter. Sungjin looked inside the encampment.

Two guards were defending the barracks. They were yawning continuously as they stood near the camp entrance. Perhaps it was because they had recently won the battle against the human forces that they were not particularly vigilant.

Afterwards, Sungjin checked the other places. In-between each barracks were round drums displaying some kind of writing written in blood.

‘There it is.’

It was a drum that was used to quickly send out an alert in case of an ambush. If that was rung, then the sound of the drum would spread throughout the camp and the entire enemy army would be alerted, and fighting them would become far more complicated. Sungjin kept those two guards and the drum in mind as he went inside the encampment. However, the sounds of conversation could be heard from somewhere.

“Haha, this is pretty tasty.”

“Right? I told you so. It's a delicacy.”

When he turned to look, Sungjin saw two demons having a meal near a fire they had set up at the outskirts of the barracks. They were eating some kind of meat as they talked about their victory in the recent engagement although it was unclear whether it was a horse's meat or human's.

“But you know, those human bastards were weaker than I thought.”

“Yeah. Everyone said that the human race was unparalleled in

their cunningness. I don't know about their cunningness, but they were all cowards. If you killed one, then three of them would run away, so my spear probably stabbed more backs and asses than it did stomachs and chests."

"I know! Kuha."

However, that demon's laugh did not continue for very long.

'Woosh~'

"Haha...hak?"

This was because Sungjin's sword came flying out of nowhere and cut out his throat. The other demon that had been eating with him looked up at Sungjin in surprise, but that was the last face he was about to ever see.

'Pishik!'

His head was cut into two pieces from top to bottom. Two demons were killed soundlessly, and none of their kin had witnessed it since they were on the outskirts. Sungjin covered himself with the mantle and said,

"Shadow Walk."

His figure soon disappeared. This item was better than the Invisibility spell because one-the cooldown was short, two-there was no mana consumption, and three-it could be invoked quickly. Sungjin headed inside the barracks after he had turned invisible. Inside, none of the demons were awake; they were all snoring loudly in their sleep.

Sungjin walked close to them and slit their throats. As they were sleeping, they could not let out screams before they crossed the river Styx.

After finishing the slaughter, Sungjin was about to walk out, when just then, a single demon approached the barracks. Sungjin sheathed his sword and waited right next to the entrance of the

barracks.

“Hey, look here, it’s time to rotate shif...”

After entering, the demon saw the corpses of his fellow kin and was about to shout in surprise.

“E...”

It was likely that the demon had been about to say “Enemy!”, or “Everyone’s dead?”, or “Everything’s went to shit!”. However, Sungjin had forcefully closed its mouth before it could shout and stabbed his sword in the demon’s heart.

“Guuu...”

The demon tried to shout and scream but did not live long due to the a hole in its chest. Sungjin calmly moved the demon’s corpse inside the barracks.

“Shadow Walk”

He once more wrapped his figure with the mantle and walked out. There were three barracks in a camp. Sungjin headed towards the next barracks. As expected, everyone in the second barracks was also fast asleep. There was a single exception.

It was a demon who was stroking his long toenail with his dagger. It might have been considered unsightly for a human being, but there was meaning for demons to do so.

A demon’s nails were as hard as iron, so if they were ever without a weapon, those long, sharp nails could be used as a substitute. If one were to exaggerate a bit about a demon’s nail care, then it could be said to be similar to Kargos tempering the weapons. Of course, it was pitiful that those nails would never see any use.

‘Slice’

The body of the demon who was taking care of its nails collapsed like a rag doll. Afterwards, Sungjin killed the rest of the demons while waiting for the skill’s cooldown to end.

“Shadow Walk”

He used the skill and walked to the last of the three barracks. Of course, everyone here was also in deep sleep. Sungjin began to end their lives one by one without much thought. However, while he was doing so,

“Hrm? Huuh?”

A demon with sensitive hearing rose from his bedding, and after seeing the throats of his allies being cut out, he shouted,

“E...Enemy!”

Sungjin urgently cut out his throat, but he could hear noises coming from outside the barracks.

“What was that?”

Sungjin quickly exited the barracks. Outside, a single demon was standing there blankly. This was one of the remaining guards, as the other of the two guards had died earlier while trying to rotate shifts. He looked at Sungjin and then began running towards the drum.

“Pa!”

Sungjin shot out his sword Blood Vengeance once he saw this.

‘Whoosh~’

Upon hearing something coming flying towards him, the demon ducked his head by instinct and avoided it. However, the drum that was used to notify everyone of an enemy intrusion was right in its path. Blood Vengeance noisily pierced the drum.

‘Buuk’

When he saw this, Sungjin slightly raised his hand and recalled his sword.

“Haa!”

Since his hand was in a different position, the angle of the sword

also slightly changed as it returned. On its way back to Sungjin's hand, Blood Vengeance completely ripped apart the drum. Having lost the tool to raise the alarm, the sole remaining demon shouted, "Ambush! It's an ambush..."

Of course, there was no reason for Sungjin to just let this be. He first used Moon Specter to stab the demon's throat and shut his mouth and then used Blood Vengeance to cut the demon in half. Afterwards, Sungjin took a glimpse of his surroundings. There were no signs of life inside the base, and only the sounds of the wind that crisscrossed the plains could be heard.

'Whiiiiiiing'

It had been a successful ambush. Sungjin left to go find the next base. However, it seemed that Besgoro did not quite like this method.

'Hrm... You said that it would be a war between one man and an army...'

"Even if it's me, to fight directly against an entire army is too risky. After reducing the number of soldiers by going around the outskirts like this, I'll fight them head on for the final battle."

'Sure, you can do it like that, but... will you be able to finish quickly like this?'

Sungjin replied with a confident attitude to Besgoro's words.

"Of course, since time is relative. If it's hard for me, then it's even harder for the other hunters."

*

Serin pulled her bowstring more carefully than she had ever before. Next to her, Edward was chanting a spell.

"An unseen blade, Dark Edge."

Soon, a large black needle-like substance appeared in his hand. Serin looked at Edward's eyes. Edward looked back and then

noded his head. This meant that he was ready. Serin counted,

“One, two, three.”

On three, the arrow on Serin’s bow flew out simultaneously with the black substance in Edward’s hand.

‘Pew’

‘Biiing~’

They flew into the demon’s encampment and went through the demon heads.

‘Pishut’

‘Pijook’

The demons that had been eating meat while chattering until just a moment ago collapsed on the spot while still holding the meat. After confirming the kills, Serin looked back and nodded her head. The other eight hunters prepared to move inside slowly once they saw Serin’s nod. The hunter that they had selected to be the party leader moved in front of them and said,

“From here on, we have to be careful. Don’t make a sound, and in one stroke,”

He made a pantomime of cutting his throat with his hand.

“Wipe them out. Understood?”

Everyone nodded their heads to his words. The remaining hunters, as befitting of people who had survived until now, were experienced. They might not have known as much as what was said in Sungjin’s briefing, but they had a basic sense of how to go through this chapter thanks to the information on the Information Sheet. Furthermore, after fighting, not their main forces, but their scouting parties, they had all come to realize one thing.

‘It’s impossible to win in a direct confrontation.’

If infiltration and assassination were not possible, then the

Power Balance in this mission would have clearly been to their disadvantage. Serin and the other hunters proceeded into the base one by one. There were two demons standing guard as they yawned. The hunter in charge held up two fingers and then swung the arm downward towards the two guards. Soon, four hunters armed with swords, daggers, and an axe approached the demons.

“Ku...”

“Kuh...”

The demons let out short groans, but thankfully it seemed that no one had heard it. The hunters then began their attack on the barracks. Everyone in the first barracks they entered was asleep. Each of the hunters approached the demons as the leading hunter held up three fingers.

‘Three, two, one.’

When all three were folded, they simultaneously shoved their blades into the demons’ necks, hearts, and heads. The first barracks was perfectly cleared. They left the corpses behind as they exited the barracks and headed towards the second one.

Serin, who had been behind the hunters, did not follow the other hunters and stayed outside the barracks. In any case, the weapons of the other hunters were more suited to ‘finishing’ the enemies inside the barracks than her arrows were. However, a drum came into her view.

‘There’s a drum in each camp. You should either rip that first or annihilate the enemy all at once.’

Serin followed Sungjin’s words and took out an arrow. With the arrow point, she ripped the drum in an X shape.

‘Riip. Riip.’

But at that moment, a shout could be heard from the second barracks that the hunters had entered.

“It’s the enemyyyyyyy!”

It seemed that some kind of problem had occurred inside. Serin looked towards the third barracks in surprise.

A squad of demons came rushing out from the barrack. They saw Serin, who had ripped the drum, and the hunters coming out of the second barrack. Serin jumped up in surprise.

Even if they had ripped the drum, if even one of those demons escaped to the other camps, then the entire enemy army would charge towards them. The other hunters had the exact same thought as well. Without any need for discussion, they charged at the demons from the last barracks.

Chapter 153 – Great Plains Of Barrastan (4)

Having figured out the situation, Serin quickly pulled her bowstring. The moment one of the demons made it to a different camp, they would immediately have to fight the entire demon army head on.

If that happened, then no matter how much confidence she had in herself, the party would be annihilated. She intended to pierce through the head of any demon that looked to be about to escape the camp. However, the demons prepared to fight instead of run.

“Everyone take up your weapons!”

It was a relief that they didn’t scatter and flee, but the problem was the noise created by the clashing of weapons.

‘Clang!’

Also, it was likely that soon the sound of someone screaming would spread.

‘Kwaaaak!’

‘Kweeeh!’

Serin pulled back her bowstring while aiming at the demon’s forehead, but she couldn’t let go because of her worry.

‘What if it makes too much noise?’

However, at that moment, the sound of Edward chanting a spell could be heard.

“A Region devoid of waves, Silent Zone.”

After a moment, a wave of magic shining with purplish light appeared and spread from Edward’s staff. At that instant, Serin could feel something peculiar. The feeling one received when entering a tunnel while driving a car, where your hearing seemed to become fuzzy. At the same time,

‘click clang’

The sound of clashing swords could no longer be heard. It seemed that some kind of magical power was blocking the sounds. Serin let go of the pulled bowstring.

When the arrow flew, the sound, ‘pew’, could not be heard. Also, the sound of the arrow stabbing itself into the demon’s neck could also not be heard. Regardless of how it was happening, there was no sound that escaped outside.

Serin nocked a second arrow on her bowstring without a moment’s rest. A very intense, but quiet fight erupted. The demons fiercely resisted the hunters despite having just woken up.

However, Serin’s arrows and Edward’s spells slowly wore away the demons’ strength, and they started to be eliminated one by one. It seemed that even though there was no sound, he could still use magic.

As the hunters’ victory was approaching, a demon that lost the will to fight turned his back and began to run away at a fast clip in the direction of a different encampment. Without any need for discussion, Edward chanted a spell and Serin drew back her bowstring.

Quickly, tree branches grew out of the ground. The moment they grabbed the demon’s feet, Serin’s arrow pierced through its head. The demon failed to reach the outside of the encampment and collapsed on the spot.

Their attack on the first encampment ended in a success as the hunters finished taking care of the remaining demons. After the fight was over, the hunters looked at Edward and soundlessly opened and closed their mouths.

‘Ah, right.’ Edward must have said.

Afterwards, he ended the spell and sound soon returned for the hunters.

“That was great, Edward!”

“It was a good choice of a spell.”

“Thanks to you we managed to finish it without any problems, Edward.”

The hunters gathered around him and heaped their praises on him. Edward modestly lowered his head. Serin looked at Edward with curiosity in her eyes. No matter how she looked at him, he did not look like a dangerous person. How strange.

“Then, let’s proceed to the next encampment.”

At the leader’s words, the hunters moved towards the boundaries of the encampment one by one. As they proceeded, Edward held up his hand to Serin and said,

“Before, your timing with the arrow was great.”

It was likely that he was asking for a high-five. Serin hesitated for a bit before she hit his hand with a slight sound. Although he had said that her hands were small for a man, his hands were also rather small.

The hunters had found the location of another encampment and were walking towards it. Serin decided that it was a good time to find out the truth about him. She slightly touched her earring as she asked him,

“Mr. Edward, you’re rather strong. How did you get so powerful?”

“Hrm, who knows... Probably... Because my beginning stats were good? I think?”

Serin waited to hear his surface thoughts. However, she did not hear them despite waiting. This could only mean that what he thought and what he said were the same. Serin looked at him, and then added a rude joke in order to interrogate him.

“You didn’t... Do something like trolling, did you?”

He replied simply to her question.

“No way.”

His surface thoughts could not be heard this time as well. Serin was a bit flustered.

“Of course, I know that there are hunters who have become strong by trolling. However, I don’t want to get strong by doing something like that. Isn’t finishing these raids our objective? Even if you become powerful by trampling on others, it doesn’t help you in getting closer to completing that objective.”

Serin looked at him blankly. His surface thoughts could not be heard at all because 10 seconds had already, but for some reason it felt like he was saying the truth. Serin made up a half-hearted excuse to him.

“Ah... Yeah, I feel the same. That was a joke. Since you’re just too strong, Mr. Edward.”

While Serin was speaking, the leader at the front of the party closed his lips and placed a finger in front of them.

“Shhh”

Now that she looked in front, the next encampment’s barracks were lined up in front of them. The hunters walked carefully towards the barracks. Serin looked at Edward, who had gone ahead, and thought,

‘No matter how I look at it... He doesn’t seem like he’ll troll...’

She would still call Sungjin later, but she felt that the three of them would have to have a conversation. Though it did seem like Sungjin would attack the moment he saw Edward.

‘If I block him... He should listen to me.’

Serin continued to think as she walked towards the second enemy encampment.

Sungjin looked around the bloody barracks. There were no living demons remaining. This was the fourth encampment. Sungjin had massacred all of the demons without letting a sound escape. Besgoro commented,

‘That was cleanly done.’

Sungjin nodded his head as he said,

“As I continued, I got more and more used to doing it.”

Though at first Besgoro had looked at it negatively. However, his feelings toward it had slightly changed as they continued.

‘If things go well, then it should be possible for you to annihilate an entire army through only assassination.’

“That’s not possible. Do you see that rather showy, large tent over there?”

Sungjin held up Blood Vengeance and pointed it towards a barracks in the more inner region of the area. There, was a flashy tent embellished in red and purple.

‘Yeah. Is that the enemy commander’s residence?’

“Yes.”

Sungjin answered him as he looked down. It felt like the area of his left abdomen, right below his solar plexus still hurt. This was where he had been stabbed by the commander’s horn before regression. Sungjin ground his teeth as he thought,

‘I’m going to turn him into mincemeat.’

“The security at that place is incredibly strict, to the point that no matter what spell or trick you use, assassination is impossible. In the end, you can only fight him head-on.”

‘I see. Well, in the end, what solves everything is fighting head-on.’

“After we remove a few more squads, we’ll begin the fight.”

‘Great.’

As Sungjin walked towards the next encampment, he began making a rough outline of his plan.

‘I don’t know who will be the Hidden Boss, but considering Ariane’s test from last time... It’ll undoubtedly be an incredibly strong opponent. I should save all of my abilities that I can use only once a day in order to deal with him.’

Sungjin checked over his options. The options that he had that could only be used once a day were ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’, Summons such as Cain and Soldamyr, and the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’.

‘I should save all of these and then go for the hidden boss.’

Sungjin decided to avoid using them if possible. Although he could know only after he met the boss, it was possible that it was an enemy that he could not beat even if he used all of those at the same time.

If there was a problem, it was that the raid’s boss, Commander Zeratar, was also incredibly strong. It was entirely possible that Sungjin might lose if he were to act carelessly. Last time when he had fought with nine allies, he had lost all nine of them.

If things did not turn out as planned, it was possible that he might have to use one or two of his abilities. Of course, it was best if he could save as many as he could. Sungjin continued to massacre everyone while relying on stealth as he went through the next barracks.

The time it took to wipe out the enemy was several times shorter than it had been before regression. This was because first, Sungjin had become used to doing this after repeating it several times, and second, as the total number of enemies had now decreased by a considerable amount, Sungjin was performing a bit carelessly and being cursory in finishing things up.

Sungjin entered the barracks where the demons were sleeping and swung his two swords as if he were a windmill and cut out the demons' throats. However, while he was doing this, he did not see the figure of a guard who had entered the tent in order to change shifts.

The demon guard saw Sungjin's incredible sword technique, which was rather impressive in that he was able to slice the demons' heads that had tough skin, muscles, and bones. He quietly returned to the camp's center and began to hit the drum to give the alert that there was an intruder.

‘Boom~! Boom~! Boom~!’

As Sungjin walked out of the barracks, the sound of the drums could be heard.

“Ahh...”

He realized his mistake.

‘What’s happening, were we found out?’ asked Besgoro.

“Yes. I had wanted to fight after taking care of at least one more... But it turned out like this.”

‘Boom~! Boom~! Boom~!’

Once the drum was heard, similar drum sounds resounded from somewhere else.

‘Boom~! Boom~! Boom~!’

And from another place.

‘Boom~! Boom~! Boom~!’

Soon, the sounds of all the soldiers rallying together could be heard.

“It’s the enemy!”

“It’s a human!”

“Arm yourselves!”

Sungjin placed Blood Vengeance in its sheath and took out Artemio as he said,

“Now, the only option is to wage war on them...”

It wasn't long before a troop of heavily armed demons began to head towards Sungjin. There seemed to be around a hundred demons. There were not many hunter parties that could survive after fighting head-on against those demons.

That was why the survival rate for this chapter was so terrible. A few hunters had even lost their wills to fight simply by seeing the sight of the demons. However, Sungjin calmly struck the first blow.

“Murderous thunder, Jump from foe to foe! Chain lightning!”

“Murderous thunder, Jump from foe to foe! Chain lightning!”

Sungjin cast a spell with Besgoro and shot it towards the demons. The vanguards who charged courageously were hit head on by the attack twice and turned into ash. Of course, the enemies did not just stand there after being hit by magic. The demons were a race born with magic power. One of them that looked like a magician shot a spell towards Sungjin.

“Dark Spear!”

Soon, a spell shaped like a long spear came flying at Sungjin.

“Absorb Magic”

Sungjin absorbed it with Artemio, and then immediately returned it towards the demons.

“Expel Magic”

The magic spear that Sungjin shot out pierced through two demons as if it were a skewer. Sungjin continued on and chanted another spell to create illusions.

“What is real is fake and what is fake is real! Illusion!”

What used to originally create three or four illusions now generated eight phantoms.

If he used the 'Ring of the Great Sage' to pump up his magic power and then cast the Illusion spell, then perhaps he could create close to an army of several dozen illusions. However, that magic power would be more effective if used on another spell.

Regardless, Sungjin charged toward the enemy lines together with the illusions that he had created. Thanks to the magic, instead of 1 versus 100, it now looked to be a 9 versus 100 fight. The nine Sungjins and the one hundred demons quickly collided.

Chapter 154 – Great Plains Of Barrastan (5)

“Besgoro, Frenzy”

Soon, Besgoro’s eyes on Sungjin’s helmet shone with a crimson light and Sungjin began to slice through the enemies rapidly. Sungjin was naturally fast, but his arms became even faster.

Moon Specter and Artemio ceaselessly sliced through the approaching enemies. At first, the demons pompously charged at Sungjin, but as the cutting rate of Sungjin’s swords began to increase, the demons started to shout in fear.

“Ahhh... Ahhhhhhhh?”

In the end, the demons at the front closest to Sungjin began to show their backs and flee.

“Sa... Save me!”

However, when they ran away, a sharp voice could be heard from behind them.

“Kill them!”

This command was not directed at Sungjin, but instead at the demons that fled from him. The demons who were waiting in the back mercilessly stabbed the demons who fled from the front to death. This was what Besgoro had spoken of in the past.

‘I didn’t kill only my enemies, but my allies as well... I killed many of those who deserted the army, or fled.’

This was exactly what had happened. The demons who fled could only helplessly bite the bullet and charge at Sungjin. However, this did not mean that Sungjin’s accelerated sword swings would show mercy to them. Sungjin sliced the approaching demons again and again. While he was cutting the demons expertly, Besgoro spoke up and told Sungjin that the duration of the skill had nearly ended.

‘5 seconds remaining, Kei.’

Even as Sungjin swung his swords, he said,

“Moon Specter, prepare yourself.”

‘Yes, Master.’

When Besgoro’s Frenzy was over, Sungjin was surrounded by corpses of the demons. Sungjin placed Moon Specter in her sheath. Surprisingly, he was out of breath.

“Haah, haah...”

Whether it was Besgoro’s Frenzy or Yanhurat’s Zealot, they both shared the same side-effect; Exhaustion. Sungjin already possessed an inhuman endurance and stamina, but even he could not help but become fatigued after swinging his swords so quickly.

“Haah, haah...”

Sungjin’s shoulders rose and fell to the rhythm of his breathing as he caught his breath. The surviving demons from the front line looked at each other.

‘Attack? Or no?’

At that moment, the sharp voice from before could be heard.

“The enemy is tired! Attack now!”

The demons charged again at Sungjin once they heard those words.

“Haah, haah...”

Even as Sungjin gasped for air, when those demons were right in front of him, he took out Moon Specter and said,

“Deathly Wail.”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaak!”

The form of Moon Specter appeared and shrieked. The demons were gripped by an irrepressible terror and fled backwards en masse.

“Kill them!”

Then, as expected, they were pierced by the blades of their fellow demons and died. If there was something different from the previous time, it was that they fled from Moon Specter’s shriek even though they knew that they would die doing so.

Having become a Unique Legendary, there was something about the sound of Moon Specter’s shriek that created some kind of primitive terror. Sungjin and Besgoro were a little scared themselves as they watched Moon Specter trailing behind the demons as she shrieked.

‘That lady... She’s kind of scary when she’s like that...’

Regardless, thanks to her actions, Sungjin had been able to recover his depleted stamina and was now able to take care of the remaining enemies by himself. Once the vanguard had all died, the main force arrived. At the same time, the Operator’s voice could be heard.

[Warning!]

[Boss monster ‘Zeratar’ has appeared!]

Sungjin looked at the main encampment. In the distance, a demon whose height reached 2.5 meters (8 feet 2 inches) stood out. This was the very demon that had pierced him with his horn. Sungjin clenched his teeth and prepared to fight against him.

“Rather impressive for a human.”

Sungjin wordlessly glared at the demon.

“But, still powerless before my power, and my army.”

‘Powerless, my ass...’

In truth, if he desired, he could choose one or two from ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’, Yanhurat, or the Ring of the Great Sage and quickly cut out the bastard’s throat. However, if he used those now, then it would be more difficult to fight the hidden

boss who came after this guy. Zeratar said vigorously,

“Go forth! I will give a special promotion to the one who brings back his head!”

Soon, the heavily armed demons began to run at Sungjin. Sungjin ordered Besgoro to use Blizzard.

“All-freezing winds! Razor sharp ice! Blizzard Storm!”

The bodies of the approaching demons briefly paused in the gust of ice, and in that moment, Sungjin clenched his teeth as he forced his way between them. A bloody massacre began once more.

What was different was that the speed with which he cut his enemies had decreased considerably from before. Not only was Sungjin’s stamina depleted, but the demons that he was fighting now were stronger than those from the vanguard. There was no doubt that the demons that were near Zeratar were elites stronger than the others.

Not only did Sungjin have to focus on attack, but he also had to dedicate his attention to defense. If he did not, then it was obvious that he would be hurt.

‘These bastards...’

However, it was at that moment that a sharp purplish spear came flying towards Sungjin.

‘Whiiz!’

It was flying at an incredibly fast speed. Sungjin had been countering almost all attacks, but he could not perfectly avoid something like this.

The tip of the sharp spear grazed the nape of Sungjin’s neck. Sungjin saw his own blood for the first time in a long while; so long that he did not remember when the last time was.

‘Kuu!’

‘Hey Kei’

‘Master, are you okay?’

The two phantoms worried over Sungjin. However, he did not have the time to reply. Once more, that spear came flying towards him. Sungjin blocked the attack by crossing his two swords into an x-shape. In an instant, a numb feeling crept over his hands. At that moment, Moon Specter shouted urgently,

‘Behind you!’

Sungjin ducked without even looking backwards.

‘Riiiiip’

The sound of something cutting his mantle could be heard. Sungjin thought,

‘This is dangerous. I have to escape from their encirclement.’

Sungjin urgently threw the Mapae located on his belt into the air.

“Hihihihin~!”

The phantom horse, Shadowrun, appeared and gave a long neigh. All the demons were slightly surprised by the sudden appearance of Shadowrun, except for one.

’Stab!’

Commander Zeratar’s spear pierced through Shadowrun’s neck, and Shadowrun turned into ashes that drifted away. Sungjin apologized immediately

‘I’m sorry, Shadowrun.’

Even though he had probably returned to the stables at ‘Ninety Nine Nights’. Anyhow, thanks to Shadowrun, Sungjin had been able to catch his breath. And again, for the first time in a very long time, he turned his back to the enemy and ran. Zeratar’s voice could be heard saying,

“Catch him!”

As Sungjin ran, he asked Moon Specter,

“Moon Specter, let me know when the enemy commander reaches the very front.”

‘Yes, Master.’

Sungjin continued to run. Zeratar became overconfident once he saw Sungjin run after being wounded by his spear. This was exactly what Sungjin had hoped for.

The demons chased after Sungjin without any need for orders, but Zeratar was the fastest of them all. He was originally stuck between his subordinates, but then he began to chase after Sungjin faster than them.

‘Master, the enemy commander is at the very front.’

The phantom Moon Specter explained the situation to Sungjin, who was running while only looking in front of him. At that moment, Sungjin turned behind and swung Artemio twice.

“Expel Magic! Expel Magic!”

The two dark spears that he had absorbed in the fight before went flying towards Zeratar. Zeratar avoided the spears, as expected of the commander, but the two demons behind him could not.

“Kwaak!”

“Kwaaahk!”

From the beginning, this was what Sungjin was aiming for: to get rid of two demons in the group that was following the enemy commander. On using both magic expels, Sungjin threw Artemio as if he were throwing an empty can after he finished drinking it.

“Pa!”

Zeratar brought up his spear and hit Artemio away.

‘Clang!’

Artemio went spinning into the sky after being hit by Zeratar’s

spear.

‘Piiiiing’

As Zeratar saw this, he muttered,

“Resorting to dirty tricks...”

He prepared to keep chasing after Sungjin, but for some reason instead, Sungjin came running towards him. The two soon collided. Sungjin swung down with Moon Specter in one hand while Zeratar simultaneously stabbed at Sungjin with his purplish spear.

‘Stab’

There were two blades that had flown through the air, but only one made a sound of impact.

“Kuhuhuhu.”

Zeratar laughed in satisfaction. This was because the moment Sungjin’s Moon Specter swung past Zeratar, Zeratar’s spear had stabbed Sungjin in the side.

However, at that moment, a second sword appeared in Sungjin’s empty hand, a crimson sword that was dyed in blood. Zeratar urgently tried to pull his spear out from Sungjin.

“Snake Eye”

But in that very instant, the eye on the pendant that Sungjin was wearing opened and froze Zeratar; Zeratar became immobilized while he was trying to pull out his spear. At this instant, Sungjin used Blood Vengeance, which had stored enough of his blood, to slit Zeratar’s throat. Everything was decided in one strike.

[Congratulations.]

[Boss monster ‘Zeratar’ Cleared]

As Sungjin heard the congratulations of the Operator, he knocked away the headless body of Zeratar and pulled out the

spear. At the same time, Sungjin let out a groan.

“Kuuuh!”

‘Are you okay?’

Moon Specter asked Sungjin. Sungjin nodded his head as he urgently canceled Blood Vengeance’s Active Skill.

“Baptism of Blood”

[HP is below half.]

The Operator’s alarm rang out the moment he said those words. In truth, Sungjin had screamed, not because of Zeratar’s spear, but because of Blood Vengeance’s Baptism of Blood.

Sungjin had immediately grasped Blood Vengeance’s handle after he threw Artemio at Zeratar, and had quietly said, “Baptism of Blood.” back then

He had used this trick in order to finish it off at once before the other demons could surround him. Afterwards, he had purposefully missed with Moon Specter and been hit by the spear.

Zeratar’s spear itself was okay. This was because, truthfully, Sungjin’s health points were higher than most tanks, and he was wearing the armor made from dragon scales.

The bigger problem was Blood Vengeance, which was now a Unique Legendary. The performance of this monster that now stole several times more of Sungjin’s blood every second was incredible, but it simply stole Sungjin’s blood just as quickly.

Though, it was thanks to this that he was able to kill the boss of the 10 man raid in one hit. Sungjin looked at the enemies while bleeding, the demons that had been scared of Sungjin from the beginning.

Once their commander died, the demons began to hesitate unconsciously. They soon began to rout as there was no one left to lead them.

‘Kill them.’ said Besgoro.

Sungjin watched their figures and then sat down without chasing them.

‘What, aren’t you going to go after them?’

Sungjin answered Besgoro’s question.

“Those guys, well... It’s just a little bit of contribution... First, I want to see the face of the Hidden Boss. I’m also a bit worried about the other Chosen Ones.”

‘Hrm...’

As he watched the fleeing soldiers, Sungjin briefly thought about the ‘Chosen Ones’. This raid definitely had some difficulty to it. It occurred to him that it could be dangerous if you had bad luck and a bad party, regardless of if there were 10 people. Sungjin called out the cube and took out the Star of the Nameless.

“Rename to Treasure Hunter”

It had been a long time since he had changed titles to Treasure Hunter. This was because he did not know the location of the raid’s Hidden Piece or the Hidden Boss.

[You have been renamed.]

Sungjin immediately asked the Operator,

“Operator, tell me the location of the Hidden Piece.”

Chapter 155 – Great Plains Of Barrastan (6)

The Operator gave a verse in response to Sungjin's prompt.

[The last resort remaining to mankind]

[was not able to shine thanks to]

[the leadership's greed for recognition.]

[During the demon's surprise attack,]

[Into the chest of a virtuous man, the holy object went]

“Hrm... There was a weapon, but it wasn't properly utilized and is left in a righteous human's chest.”

It was a verse that was both easy and difficult. Sungjin turned and looked around. There were only demons in the Great Plains of Barrastan, and no humans. That is, 'living humans'. Instead, human corpses were piled in unbelievable amounts. Besgoro muttered,

‘...Is it in one of the many corpses we've seen until now?’

Sungjin pursed his lips as he said,

“That's probably the case.”

It seemed that to find the hidden piece all you had to do was search the corpses. Sungjin asked for the hint about the Hidden Boss.

“What's the hint for the Hidden Boss?”

[A reclusive researcher of magic]

[Seeking a way to replenish mana for research]

[Flew to watch the war unfold]

[Sleepily, he observes from the sky]

[For Blue light to shine among the tiny lifeforms fighting below]

“Hr....m”

Besgoro simply said,

‘I don’t get this at all.’

Sungjin felt the same. This time he looked up at the sky. In the vast skies above the plains that stretched all the way to the horizon, bald eagles that followed the scent of corpses could be seen occasionally flying around.

“There’s probably no way... that a bald eagle is the boss.”

‘Since it’s a reclusive researcher of magic, shouldn’t it be a person? A magician that uses magic to fly around?’

There was no time to dither about. Sungjin briefly thought about the two verses, then quickly made a decision.

“Then, for now, I’ll look through the corpses. While I’m doing this, you two phantoms should keep a lookout from the sky. There might be something else flying around other than the eagle.

‘Ok.’

‘Understood, Master’

Sungjin looked down at his waist, and then soon came to a realization.

‘Ah...’

Now that he thought about it, he had already used Shadowrun in order to escape earlier.

‘Though he’s the best in the plains...’

Sungjin instead removed the magic carpet from the cube. He could also call out Rajenta, but did not since he could be used in combat. He felt that it would be good to call him out together with both Cain and Soldamyr for the Hidden Boss.

Sungjin climbed on top of the magic carpet and then began to circle around the Barrastan Plains while flying low in the air.

While flying around, he saw a place where human corpses were gathered; the demons had carelessly piled the corpses into a mountain.

Sungjin stopped there and got off from the carpet. The bald eagles were still hovering about near the corpses. The eagles paused from voraciously devouring the corpses and turned their heads to look at Sungjin when he approached. Their eyes seemed to be asking,

‘What do you want?’

However, Sungjin suddenly glared at them.

‘Flap flap’

The eagles got scared out of its wits and they flew away once they felt Sungjin’s killing intent. Sungjin then approached the heap of corpses. Though you could get used to any odour, it was difficult to really get used to the smell of rotting corpses.

Sungjin wrinkled his nose as he searched through the heap one by one. However, there was something strange about the bodies. Whether it was their pockets or their vests, any place where you could ‘hide something’ had all been searched through.

He did not know if the demons also liked gold or not, but in any case, it did not seem like he would find any kind of ‘holy object’ from these corpses.

Sungjin once again climbed on the carpet and circled the surroundings. There was another similar heap of corpses located not far away. It was about 1.5 meters tall. It seemed that the demons liked to make the piles in a manner that was comfortable to their own height.

Sungjin went closer and once more searched through the pile of corpses. It seemed that the demons had gone through the heap here as well. There was nothing like a ‘holy object’. Besgoro muttered,

‘If it’s like this... When will we find it?’

Sungjin was also thinking the exact same thing. He then requested the cube to repeat the verse once more.

“Operator, tell me the hint for the Hidden Piece again.”

Soon, the verse could be heard from the cube.

[...The holy item is in a righteous human’s chest]

‘A righteous human’s chest...’

Sungjin climbed on the magic carpet and flew just a bit higher into the sky. There were countless piles of corpses like the ones he had seen till now throughout the Barrastan Plains.

“A righteous human...”

He did not know what that meant, but it should refer to a human who was special in some way. It did not seem like the Hidden Piece would be in one of those piles. Sungjin decided to look around some more instead of thoughtlessly looking through the countless corpses.

While going around looking for the ‘righteous human’, he also ran into a few teams of demons. They were the survivors who had scattered in all directions after Commander Zeratar died. In other words, they were deserters.

Sungjin climbed down from the carpet and cut their necks each time he saw them. Not only did it increase his contribution, but it also filled up the health points he had lost while fighting Zeratar.

Another reason was that he was also about to face the Hidden Boss soon. Every time Sungjin drew the demons’ blood, the life stealing ring on his finger would let out an eerie crimson light. It was not a scene you could see often.

This was because, from the beginning, there were not many cases where Sungjin would take damage. Either way, Sungjin went around killing demon stragglers he occasionally found while also

making sure to look out for special corpses from time to time. But nothing of the sort could be seen.

“Besgoro, Moon Specter. Do you see anything strange?”

‘There’s nothing other than eagles.’

‘No, I also haven’t seen anything other than eagles as well.’

“Hrm...”

Sungjin frowned. However, there was no particular method that could be used to search beyond this one. He once again circled the Great Plains of Barrastan while on the magic carpet. There was a stream that cut through the center of the plains.

Sungjin searched the area around the stream since the area looked somewhat more special than the other places. He kept flying while following the stream.

While searching near the stream, something peculiar caught his eye. There were bloodstains that were steadily headed towards the stream. Sungjin quickly landed near that area. Now that he looked, there was also the corpse of a horse nearby.

‘Strange.’

Sungjin followed the bloodstains and walked next to the stream. When he did so, he quickly discovered a corpse that had died with his upper torso stuck in the stream.

He did not know if it was ‘righteous’, but in any case, it was obviously a ‘special’ corpse. Sungjin approached the corpse. Besgoro said,

‘This friend here hurt his ankle after he fell off the horse. The fatal wound was... Likely the arrow that’s stuck in his back.’

Sungjin looked down. As Besgoro had said, the corpse’s ankle was twisted.

‘It looks like he had crawled here after he was mortally wounded... But it’s unlikely that it’s because he wanted a drink.’

Sungjin held the corpse and pulled it out of the water.

“Kuuuh...”

The smell of regular corpses was repulsive, but it was even worse in this case as the corpse had been in the water. Sungjin looked through his vest. The man, who was wearing a plate armor, looked like he had held a rather high position.

‘Even if he’s not the commander, he looks like the sub-commander?’

Sungjin cut off the plate armor with his sword. Inside, he was wearing clothes made of leather. Sungjin searched through it, but there was nothing to be found.

“Shit...”

He had done this much, but for it to be in vain.

‘Master.’

However, Moon Specter suddenly spoke up,

‘There, inside his chest.’

“Hm?”

At Moon Specter’s words, Sungjin examined the chest of the corpse. Inside the waterlogged chest, there was something giving off a blue light.

“I’m sorry.”

Sungjin gave a short apology, and then cut open the corpse’s chest with Blood Vengeance. He then extended his hand and grabbed the round object that gave off a blue light. It was hard. Sungjin thought,

‘What’s this?’

At that moment, the Operator made an announcement.

[Congratulations! You have obtained the Hidden Piece]

[‘Elendil’s Final Preparation’]

‘Good.’

It seemed that this man had purposefully swallowed this and drowned himself in the river in order to hide it. Sungjin did not know what this was, but in any case, since it was called the last resort, it was undeniably something important. And since the man had even attempted to protect this while he was dying, he was definitely ‘righteous’.

Sungjin took it out and washed off the blood in the flowing water by the streamside. It was a gem. A strange, blue gemstone in which there seemed to be some kind of cloud floating about. A thought came to his mind as he looked at it,

‘This... is some kind of final bastion? But I feel like I’ve seen this somewhere...’

Sungjin, as he had always done, was about to hold it above his head. However, at that moment, the sound of something flying through the sky could be heard.

‘Whiiiiiiiiz!’

Sungjin urgently placed the gem in his pocket and took out his sword. At that instant, a man appeared right in front of him.

‘Thud!’

A beautiful man, approximately 180cm in height, with a long nose, blue eyes, and blonde hair.

Sungjin looked at him.

‘Who’s this?’

Then, the man said,

“Hand that gem to me, human.”

For a ‘human’, to refer to another ‘human’ as ‘human’. This could only mean that the man was something that had taken the

shape of a human. Sungjin asked him,

“And if I refuse?”

The man simply replied,

“Then you will die.”

There was absolute confidence in his voice. Sungjin clenched his jaws. This man who had suddenly appeared from the skies was the hidden boss. And if it was as Sungjin had predicted,

“You... Are you a Dragon as well?”

The man nodded in response to Sungjin’s question.

“That’s right. I’m a Dragon. Between you and me, there’s a gap in strength as large as the gap between the earth and the skies. I saw you killing those demons before. You’re obviously a strong human. However, even so, resisting against me is pointless. You understand what I’m saying, right?”

Sungjin quickly began to think.

‘So the Hidden Piece and the Hidden Boss were linked together. If I don’t hand it over, I’ll die...’

Sungjin prepared himself mentally in order to fight the man. However, if he truly was a Dragon, then it was obvious that he would be on the same level as Ariane, if not stronger.

‘A head-on fight is impossible. Then...’

While Sungjin was thinking, the man asked,

“You... Human, that blue ring. Just where did you get that ring?”

Amongst the many rings that Sungjin was wearing, the one the man was pointing to was none other than the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’. The ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ that Ariane had gifted to him. However, now that he looked at it, it had the same gemstone as the circular gem that he held in his hand.

A blue shape with clouds flowing inside of it. It seemed that the

Dragon was looking for this gem. While Sungjin was thinking this the dragon again said,,

“Answer me. Just where did you find that ring?”

But, those words struck something inside of Sungjin. Although his mouth had been closed, Sungjin unconsciously opened it and said,

“I received it. From another Dragon.”

“A Dragon?”

“Yes.”

“Hrm... From whom?”

Sungjin kept his mouth shut this time as well. However, the man again repeated himself with a bit of strength,

“Answer me. From whom did you receive the ring?”

Sungjin attempted to keep his mouth closed, but it opened and answered the question.

“Ariane.”

Chapter 156 – Great Plains Of Barrastan (7)

The Dragon had a suspicious expression in response to Sungjin's answer.

“Ariane? Ariane gave you that ring?”

Sungjin had by now given up on refusing to answer his questions since Dragons had the ability to force people to talk simply by speaking.

“That's right. She gave it to me.”

“Really? Her? Unbelievable... But... It's even more unbelievable for you to have taken that after killing her... Did you... Have some kind of trade with her?”

While the Dragon was talking, Sungjin attempted to look for potential opportunities.

‘What and how can I deal damage on him...’

While he was pondering this, the Dragon once again spoke forcefully.

“Speak. What deal did you make with her?”

Sungjin unconsciously began to talk about what had happened with her in length.

“Ariane said that she would give me a gift if I managed to hit her once while fighting her with my all. And then she gave me this ring as the gift.”

The Dragon looked at Sungjin with narrowed eyes. His eyes glinted briefly.

“Oh ho... Really? Then that means you succeeded in attacking her once, right? On that Ariane?”

Sungjin did not know if all Dragons were like this, but this one definitely seemed to be interested in the ‘Ariane-style test’. Sungjin

said to him, “That’s right. I inflicted damage on her. That’s why she gave me this ring.”

Sungjin decided to try and steer the conversation into conducting another ‘Ariane-style test’. Since the dragon referred to Ariane by her name, he was most likely similar in age to her, or perhaps even older.

If that was the case, then he had no chance of winning since in general Dragons were creatures whose strength was decided by their age. However, if he spoke the right words and was able to bring about a single victorious moment like he did with Ariane, then it was not entirely impossible. He had already done it once. However, the dragon simply nodded its head.

“Hrm... Really... That’s how it was...”

He did not mention anything about a test.

“I see.”

“I understand now. Well, hand over that gem and that ring. I require those minerals after all.”

Sungjin’s jaw dropped wide. Besgoro added,

‘What? Just what are we supposed to do now?’

The Dragon took a step towards Sungjin. Sungjin put the gem inside his vest and took out his sword. After having taken two steps, the dragon stopped in place and asked, “Do you know what value those gems have?”

Sungjin briefly glanced down then looked back up and glared at the dragon as he said, “I know.”

“Really?”

The Dragon looked at Sungjin with surprise. Sungjin said to the Dragon the very words that Ariane had told him when she had given the ring.

“This ring... It’s an item that will help me overcome my tragic

fate.”

“Mmm?”

The Dragon made a strange expression once it heard Sungjin’s words. A face that seemed to say, ‘What kind of bullshit is that?’

While Sungjin wordlessly looked at him, the dragon suddenly opened his hand towards Sungjin. Sungjin was incredibly nervous that some kind of spell would appear from it. However, the Dragon then said, “... Then should I read it?”

“What?”

The moment Sungjin tilted his head, he was suddenly overcome with the feeling that he was being pulled towards the dragon’s hands. Sungjin tried to jump backwards in order to prevent being pulled towards the dragon, but at that moment, the feeling disappeared. When he looked downwards, he was at the same place.

‘What was that? Dizziness?’

As he did this, the Dragon lowered his hand and then suddenly grinned.

“You... aren’t someone from this dimension? You died... and then repeated the same thing...”

It seemed that in that short moment, the Dragon had looked over Sungjin’s past. Sungjin wordlessly looked at the Dragon.

“It truly is a tragic fate... Is that why Ariane helped?”

The Dragon muttered to himself. Sungjin saw a little bit of hope from that. Regardless of how the talks went, it was fine as long as it was not a direct confrontation. However, “Your situation is pitiful, but I still have to receive the gem and the ring. Those items are absolutely necessary for my magic research.”

It seemed that this Dragon’s personality was quite different from that of Ariane’s.

“It’s rather regrettable. You struggled diligently, only to reach this conclusion. If you hand over the ring, you lose the chance to overcome your fate. If you don’t hand over the ring, you lose your life. There are only sad endings remaining for you. Still, I’ll give you the freedom to at least choose the ending. That’s why, tell me. Will you hand over the ring and survive? Or will you not hand over the ring and die?”

Sungjin briefly considered the Dragon’s words. Was it possible to win if he fought against it with all of his strength? It was likely that he did not have a chance.

If that was the case and he handed over the ring here and survived, how many Chapters more could he clear? After all, Sungjin had become the last one alive even without the ring.

It was possible that he could somehow clear the final chapter even without the ring and become the savior of humanity. Sungjin grasped the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ in his hand.

However, he felt that he would regret things if he handed this over now. Until this point, he had never once run away from a fight against a boss monster.

He did not want to do so, no matter how strong the opponent was. Not to mention, he couldn’t help but dwell on Ariane’s words. She had obviously said that this ring was a ring that would let him overcome his fate. Sungjin wordlessly stood there for a moment, then shook his head as he said, “There isn’t a choice among the ones you’ve given that I want to choose. I won’t give you the ring, and I’ll survive this place.”

“...Those words...Do you mean that you’ll resist me?”

Sungjin did not reply and took out his swords. Seeing that figure, the Dragon smirked as he said, “That’s fine. Then I’ll end your tragic fate here.”

After he spoke, the Dragon took a step towards Sungjin. Soon,

the Operator's voice could be heard.

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

['Magic Researcher' Archae'ard has appeared!]

It was the Operator's warning that he had heard countless times until now, but Sungjin was startled.

"Aahh, wait a moment!"

At Sungjin's cry, the Dragon stopped walking.

"What's this? Weren't you energetically coming at me just a moment ago? Did you change your mind now?"

Sungjin asked him,

"...You're... Going to fight as you are? In human form?"

"That's correct. I lived for a long time in the human world. That's probably why... A human's body has become more comfortable. This form seems to be a bit more admirable aesthetically as well. It might be a bit strange to say this... But I dislike returning to my original form."

It seemed that he was a bit of a strange one.

"...Okay. Regardless, give me a moment to prepare myself for the fight. About a minute. You can give a human who is about to fight against a Dragon that much time, right?"

"...Ok, sure. A minute. I'll prepare a bit myself as well."

He pointed to an empty space as he said,

"Summon"

Soon, a staff was summoned. The staff had a body made of gold and a bluish sphere embedded in it. When he closely examined it, the bluish sphere seemed to be of the same material as the Hidden Piece that Sungjin had acquired.

'Is it that he already has some, but requires more?'

While Sungjin considered this, he quickly took out the items that he could take out. He first threw Cain's wooden figurine and Rajenta's egg into the sky and rubbed Soldamyr's lamp.

The summons looked at the Dragon that stood right in front of Sungjin. Cain and Rajenta did not know how to speak, but it seemed that they could instinctively feel that this was an incredibly strong opponent. They both cried out threateningly.

“Woof Woof!”

“Kyaaaaak!”

The Dragon looked at them without much thought, but the moment Soldamyr, the only one of the summons who could speak, saw the Dragon, he flusteredly spoke to Sungjin.

“Good God... Master, this time... Is it a Blue Dragon?”

Sungjin glanced between Soldamyr and the Dragon. Things like scales could not be seen. The one thing that he could find out was that the Dragon's eyes were blue.

“Ah, that guy's a Blue Dragon?”

“...Yes. You can tell by looking at the color of their eyes... Originally, there's an unspoken rule that Dragons change the color of their eyes to match the color of their scales when they polymorph so that they can recognize each other.”

“I see... A Blue Dragon. Then he should be proficient in Blue Magic?”

“Of course.”

Sungjin briefly examined the Dragon. He was holding a staff, and the Operator had even described him as a ‘Magic Researcher’. Sungjin wordlessly placed Blood Vengeance in its sheath and took out Artemio. Soldamyr added, “Be careful. It's not obvious because he's naturally strong, but that dragon... I think his Magic Power is stronger than the Red Dragon you met last time...”

Sungjin's nervousness returned in full at those words. Stronger than Ariane. Doubts about whether he had a chance to win began to rise. However, there was nothing to be done. He had already decided to put his life on the line and fight. Sungjin said to his summons, "Cain, Rajenta, Soldamyr. This might be my last fight. Please do your best."

They each replied to Sungjin's request.

"Woof"

"Kyaang"

"Understood. Though my ability is poor, I'll do my best to protect Master."

Sungjin continued and spoke to the two ghosts.

"Besgoro, Moon Specter. Please do your best until the end."

'What are you saying? Your last will? Are you planning to die here?'

'Don't say such things. Master, I'll help you to the best of my ability.'

"No, I don't mean that, but it is possible that this might be our last fight."

'Don't worry; you're stronger than that big lizard.'

'Of course, Master.'

Sungjin grinned as he heard the two ghosts' encouragement. He then prepared the last item.

"Operator, will you take out Yanhurat?"

Sungjin took off the necklace he was wearing and wore Yanhurat on his neck. It had been a while since he had last worn it. Yanhurat began to rapidly whisper to Sungjin as if it had been holding back until now.

'Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!'

Sungjin did not ignore the voice this time. If there was a single chance, then he would not ignore the voice. Sungjin then took out the Star of the Nameless. This took some consideration.

Should he boost his stats with 'Master Hunter' or increase his damage with 'Dragon Slayer'. In truth, he could not estimate which was better. However, the length of time he had asked from the Dragon was just one minute. Sungjin did not ponder for long.

“Rename to Master Hunter.”

It was possible that Dragon Slayer was better, but he had fought until now with the optimized stats from Master Hunter. Whether it was swords or spells. In any case, it was probably better that he fought with the setting that he was most used to.

Also, he did not know why, but he thought that it would be better to die with the title 'Master Hunter' equipped if this truly was his last fight. After having changed even his title, Sungjin finally took out and held 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms'. He then said to the Dragon, “I’m ready.”

“Really? Then let’s begin.”

Then, the moment the Dragon finished speaking, he suddenly added another sentence.

“Pierce them to death, Ice Spear.”

Soon, an incredibly immense icicle flew towards Sungjin. Sungjin’s eyes opened wide as he raised Artemio high. However, before the icicle had reached Sungjin, the dragon added another sentence.

“Freeze to death, Blizzard Storm.”

Chapter 157 – Great Plains of Barrastan (8)

An enormous gale raged once the Dragon finished speaking. A gust where it would be difficult for a normal person to remain standing. Cain, Rajenta, and even Soldamyr could not move properly in that gale. However, Sungjin regained his footing and was able to precisely hit away the ice spears that came flying towards him.

“Absorb Magic”

Soon, an incoming ice spear was absorbed by Sungjin’s Artemio. Artemio briefly shivered on its own before giving off a violet light more fiercely than it had ever before.

It was as if the spell it had absorbed was too much for it to handle. The power of the spells that the Dragon had shot out was simply that much stronger. The problem was that these abnormally strong spells were sent flying one after the other. Even the chants that he used to cast were completely different as well.

“Be cut to death, Wind Cutter.”

Even though the Dragon was speaking nonchalantly, the many emerald colored blades flying towards Sungjin were enormous. Sungjin ducked his head, jumped, and bent his waist as he avoided them acrobatically. However, his shin was lightly cut by the last blade.

“Kuuk!”

He thought that he had avoided it but hadn’t been able to because his body had become slightly stiff from the violently raging blizzard. Sungjin slightly bent his knee. He couldn’t afford to be attacked one-sidedly any longer.

“Substitute Reading”

For now, he activated ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ as he

simultaneously rang ‘Manyata – Master’s Bell’.

‘Ring Ring’

Once it rang, Cain and Rajenta who were cowering before, now began to move quickly. At the same time, Gourmet’s Monocle started reading the book.

“At that time, when Sima Yi reached Xicheng like a storm on his horse, Zhuge Liang was sitting on top of the gates by himself as he played the zither.”

“Woof Woof!”

“Kyaaar!”

The Dragon’s gaze turned to the two beasts briefly. The Dragon held out his hand and drew a small circle in the air as he said,

“Freeze, Frozen.”

Cain and Rajenta froze in place when the Dragon finished. Sungjin was taken aback, but even still, he did not miss the slight gap that was created by their sacrifice.

“Expel Magic”

Sungjin swung Artemio. Soon, the ice spear that he had absorbed previously shot out. The Dragon seemed to be slightly surprised when the spell that he had cast before began to return towards him.

“H’oh...”

However, the ice spear that Sungjin shot out was sucked into the Dragon’s hand with a single word.

“Return.”

It was just like Artemio’s ‘Absorb Magic’. While Sungjin was surprised, Soldamyr spoke up from behind him.

“Master, Blue Magic does not work on that Blue Dragon.”

‘Tch...’

Sungjin bit his lower lip. His own specialty was naturally Blue Magic spells, but since he could not use Blue Magic, Sungjin decided to run towards the Dragon with his two swords in place of magic. However, at that moment, Rajenta, who had been frozen next to the Dragon, broke free of the ice and charged at it as well.

“Kyang!”

Seeing that Cain was still frozen, it was likely that Rajenta was able to regain mobility because of the Royal Griffin’s inherent magic resistance.

Under the influence of the Master’s Bell, Rajenta charged at the Dragon with incredible speed. However, in that instant, the Dragon disappeared from that spot.

While Rajenta was puzzled, the Dragon appeared above Rajenta’s back. Rajenta was unable to see, but Sungjin was able to barely perceive the Dragon’s movement. The moment Rajenta was about to swoop down on the Dragon, the Dragon had quickly jumped and landed on Rajenta’s back.

“Royal Griffin... Is it the bloodline of the Imperial Family...”

At that time, the crimson energy that surrounded Rajenta dissipated. The period of invincibility from Manyata had come to an end. Sungjin urgently ran towards the Dragon, but by that time the Dragon had already used his staff to strongly strike downwards at Rajenta’s head. Rajenta collapsed on the spot with his wings and legs spread apart.

‘Grind’

Sungjin ground his molars as he ran at the Dragon.

“In rush current.”

Soldamyr held lightning in his hands as he ran towards the Dragon together with Sungjin performing a simultaneous attack from both sides. The Dragon stabbed his long staff towards Sungjin as he held out a hand to Soldamyr and said,

“Begone, Spirit.”

Sungjin barely avoided the staff that abruptly came flying towards him by ducking his head. At the same time, Soldamyr suddenly became transparent and passed through the Dragon.

The lightning that Soldamyr held still continued to crackle, but it looked as if it was no longer a part of this world. Only Sungjin was left. He could not let the sacrifices of his allies be in vain.

Sungjin elaborately swung his two swords at the Dragon. Even this dragon, who had blindly shot out spells with short chants could not use magic once Sungjin’s swords were flying at him. He could only swing his staff to defend himself.

‘Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!’

Sungjin swung his swords more intensely than he had ever before. However, just like with Ariane, the Dragon blocked his every strike. Sungjin waited for the substitute reading of ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ to finish. If he received the buff from that, then the battle would turn in his favor. Soon, the sound of completion of the substitute reading could be heard.

“Whereupon, fearing Zhuge Liang’s schemes, Sima Yi retreated.”

[Seance of Zhuge Liang activated!]

‘If it’s Zhuge Liang, then it’ll be a civil servant.’

However, civil servant typically increased stats related to magic.

[Passive Skill – Rapid Cast (III), Increased Mana (III) applied.]

[Active Skill – Desperate Maneuver(I) available for use]

As expected, skills related to magic were applied to Sungjin.

‘Why couldn’t it give me Zhang Fei... Like it did against Ariane.’

When Sungjin briefly complained in his mind, the Dragon, who had been only defending, attacked Sungjin with the end of the staff. Sungjin avoided it and launched an attack at the same time.

He attacked simultaneously with both Moon Specter and Artemio, but the Dragon avoided the trajectories of the two swords with a strange movement. Sungjin chased after the Dragon. However, the Dragon then grinned. Sungjin continued to swing his swords as he thought,

‘What’s with this guy?’

He continued to swing his swords even as he wondered. However, the Dragon, which had originally been using both hands to hold the staff to block Sungjin’s attacks, now held it with just one hand and blocked all of Sungjin’s attacks. While Sungjin was surprised, the Dragon said,

“Your sword skills are rather impressive.”

Sungjin was angered when the Dragon appraised him. However, no matter how he attempted to create a gap, the Dragon did not allow a single attack to land on itself.

‘Cla~clang! Clang! Clang!’

The Dragon continued to speak even as the staff and swords clashed countless times.

“But, I have already fought against many swordsmen that had reached the pinnacle.”

Incredibly incensed, Sungjin thought,

‘Let’s see if you can block this.’

He swung Moon Specter from top to bottom and Artemio from left to right simultaneously. An attack that was difficult to perform without the ring of the Siamese twins. However, the Dragon inserted his staff directly into the intersection point of the cross slash.

‘Claang!’

Sungjin’s two swords and the Dragon’s staff interlocked in one spot. The Dragon grinned as it said,

“You’re just one of many.”

‘Guguguuk...’

When Sungjin attempted to pull free by force, the Dragon pointed his empty left hand at Sungjin.

‘Master, danger!’

The moment Moon Specter gave a warning, a wave of incredible strength could be felt from the Dragon’s hand.

“Explode. Energy Bolt”

‘Booom!’

With a thundering noise, Sungjin was sent flying far away once he took a direct hit from the spell at close range. He was dazed by the incredible impact, but he was able to recover mid-air and land on his feet.

‘Kuu...’

His abdomen agonized him as if it had been pierced. He looked down and saw that the armor made from Dragon’s scales had been ripped apart. If he did not have that, then it was possible that he might have simply died on the spot.

However, he did not have the time to think about that because the Dragon was now slowly walking towards him. Sungjin quickly considered his options.

‘Should I use Yanhurat now?’

However, if he used that, then ‘rational thinking’ became impossible. If it did not work, then he would die immediately. He would have to consider it after first using the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’. Sungjin decided to find a way out using magic instead of physical force especially since the man most famous for his intellect in the ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’, Zhuge Liang, had been chosen.

‘The passive skills were Rapid Cast and Increased Mana... And

the active skill was Desperate Maneuver.'

For now, Sungjin shot out a spell towards the approaching Dragon.

"Fire Ball!"

And quickly followed it up with a second shot.

"Fire Ball!"

Two spheres of fire were shot out one after another. The Dragon that had been walking towards Sungjin briefly stopped and created a wall of ice.

"Arise, Ice Wall"

The first flame that Sungjin had shot out popped once it hit the wall.

'Booom!'

It stopped after melting a circular shape in the center of the ice wall.

'Booom!'

The flame that came afterward did break the ice wall, but it did not hurt the Dragon at all. It was possible that the Dragon had used his spell to match the size of the approaching fire balls.

'Shit...'

While Sungjin clenched his jaw, the Dragon asked,

"Hrm? A human with rapid cast. Weren't you a Swordsman?"

This time, Sungjin shot out a stronger spell together with Besgoro.

"Inferno."

"Inferno."

He cast two more spells right behind the first spell.

"Inferno!"

“Inferno!”

Four gigantic flames over 5 meters tall burned the land as they flew towards the Dragon. This time, the Dragon just pointed below his feet and said again,

“Arise, Ice Wall!”

A wall of ice nearly as big as a building was created below his feet. The Dragon watched the approaching fire balls from on top of the wall. The four flames that Sungjin fired hit the ice wall one by one.

The ice wall melted quickly once hit by the fire, but the Dragon that was on top of it smoothly rode down the melting ice with frustrating casualness.

‘As expected... With magic it’s...’

He could not inflict damage on the Dragon even after borrowing the strength of ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’. Actually, it might have been his hubris to have attacked the Dragon with magic in the first place. Once he reached the ground, the Dragon tilted his head.

“How are you able to use magic like that?”

As the Dragon asked, he saw ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ floating next to Sungjin, and turned towards it.

“H’oh, this is... The power of a legendary omnibus, interesting.”

For the Dragon to look somewhere else even though Sungjin was standing right in front of him, was a spectacle that was an immense blow to Sungjin’s pride. However, Sungjin had to take advantage of even opportunities like this.

“After killing you, I will take this as well, human. I will have to use it as a research material. I came searching because I heard that there was a Sky Gem in the human army, but... There is more loot here than I expected.”

During this time, Sungjin began to think quickly.

‘In accordance with the situation, ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ recommends the most appropriate hero... Even if the passive skill doesn’t do much... The active skill should do something. After using it, I should use all of my means right afterwards. That’s the best I can do.’

After organizing his thoughts, Sungjin put Artemio away and took out Ariane. Then, he used the Active Skill that he had received from ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’.

“Desperate Maneuver.”

Note on Romance of the Three Kingdoms reference:

Shu (country of Liu Bei) was many years into war against Wei (Country of Cao Cao), and Zhuge Liang was in disadvantage. He only had a thousand or so troops in the middle of carrying away supplies, and were stuck at a small supply depot. But luckily, he had two things at his disposal.

One, was that the depot itself was surrounded by mountainous regions, suitable for ambush, and two, Zhuge Liang had never ever made a risky strategy (never gambled). He was famous for always being careful.

So pushed into the corner about to lose a great deal of supplies, he decided to gamble for the first and last time.

Zhuge Liang opened the gates, had peasants sweep the path in and out of the gatehouse as he sat alone above the gates, drinking tea, playing music on an ancient chinese instrument.

Sima Yi, grand strategist of Wei rode his horse up to the gate with tens of thousands of men, and simply listened to Zhuge Liang play music calmly on top of the gates. He declared that this was a trap because Zhuge Liang was not a man to gamble, and taking the castle would result in disaster.

Sima Yi retreated, sending out many scouts into the mountains

to root out the ambush and carefully approach the castle.

As Sima Ya retreated, the string snaps on the instrument and Zhuge Liang comments

“This was the most dangerous gamble I have ever taken. It only worked because I have never gambled before, and it is not a strategy I can ever repeat again. Had I missed a note, Sima Yi would have immediately ordered the attack and broken the ruse.”

[Youtube Video for reference](#)

Chapter 158 – Great Plains of Barrastan (9)

[Active skill ‘Desperate Maneuver’ applied.]

Sungjin kept his gaze fixed on the Dragon as he kept an ear open for the Operator’s voice. He would decide his strategy based on what the Active Skill was.

[Desperate Maneuver: When MP is completely exhausted, consume HP instead of MP.]

‘What?’

Sungjin was surprised but did not let it show.

‘Consume HP instead of MP? Then when I use magic...’

All sorts of plans appeared in Sungjin’s mind. However, he did not have the time to review them one by one. Instead, Sungjin made a simple decision.

‘In any case, I can only win by using magic.’

For the moment, Sungjin threw out both of the spells stored in Artemio.

“Expel Magic!”

“Expel Magic!”

Giant ice spears flew out from Artemio. The Dragon held out his hand and absorbed them just as he had done before. However, that did not matter since, from the beginning, Sungjin was only aiming to buy time.

“Pa!”

After expelling the spells, Sungjin shot Artemio at the Dragon like he did earlier at Commander Zeratar. The Dragon struck the approaching Artemio with the end of the staff and deflected it high into the sky.

‘Clang!’

Afterwards, he grasped Artemio, which was spinning in the sky, by its handle. This was impossible unless you could read its trajectory and velocity, and precisely read the amount of strength required when parrying it.

The Dragon glanced at Artemio and examined it closely. As befitting his nickname 'Magic Researcher', he seemed to have a lot of interest in magic related items.

“Hoh, this... Is this a sword that can absorb the power of magic and then expel it? This too... I'll have to take it with me and study it.”

Saying that he'll take someone else's sword and what not, the Dragon was maintaining quite an arrogant attitude.

‘Arrogant bastard. Let's see you stay cocky after this.’ cursed Sungjin as he took out and held Ariane with his empty hand. Though the Dragon did not know, taking out Ariane was no different from indicating that Sungjin would use the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’. Sungjin first ordered Ariane to handle half of the mana cost.

“Mana Flow”

Ariane, the sword made from a Dragon's heart, began to quietly cry out.

‘Oooom’

Sungjin continued and initiated the Active Skill of the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’.

“Amplify Magic”

Soon, the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ gave off a bright light. The Dragon saw Sungjin doing this, yet still looked at him with eyes filled with curiosity and not fear.

“Hoh... So, you know how to use that?”

Sungjin immediately launched a spell at him.

“Fireball!”

It was not just a fireball. It was a fireball after Sungjin’s Magic Power had been amplified by five times. This incredibly huge fireball had completely destroyed the Ice Palace of the Ice Witch. The Dragon Archae’ard, who had been relaxed until just a moment ago, showed a flustered expression for the first time after seeing the fireball.

“What? Arise! Ice Wall!”

“Arise! Ice Wall!”

It seemed that the Dragon was not satisfied even after creating two layers of ice walls as he cast a defense spell on himself.

“Protect me! Anti Magic Shell!”

The Dragon’s calculations were right for the most part once again. The flame that Sungjin shot broke through the Dragon’s ice walls one by one and then crashed against his Anti Magic Shell.

‘Boooooooooom!’

The Dragon Archae’ard was astonished. Even though he had been able to roughly guess the power of the fireball after seeing its size, it had been several hundred years since his magic defense had been damaged.

‘No way... Had there been a time when a human’s spells have been this strong?’

While the Dragon was surprised, Sungjin charged at it with an unbelievable speed. Flustered, Archae’ard urgently held up his staff and began to block Sungjin’s attacks.

‘Clang Clang Clang!’

Having perfect proficiency with both hands thanks to an item allowed Sungjin to make unpredictable and flashy dual-sword style attacks. If it had been an inexperienced Dragon, then he would have already turned into minced meat.

However, Archae'ard was different. He had already regained his composure before even a few seconds had passed.

‘Clang Clang Claaang!’

This was because he had already received Sungjin's attacks dozens of times. The Dragon Archae'ard was a scholar. Having read thousands of books on magic and combat and having fought tens of thousands of times, he was akin to a living avatar of war.

The level of Sungjin's attacks was something that he could perfectly defend against with his experience. However, he had a small lingering doubt.

‘Why did he stop using attacking with magic and return to hand-to-hand combat?’

It was obvious that the spells cast using the Sky Gem were threatening even to him. But the human came charging back with the same swordsmanship which had previously failed to work against him. Now that he thought about it, he really began to wonder. However, shortly after, Archae'ard was able to come up with a reason.

‘This guy. He doesn't have enough mana.’

The fireball that he had just shot out was a spell that was obviously beyond the what a human was capable of. Even if he used the ring embedded with the Sky Gem to drag out his Magic Power, he was incapable of doing anything about his mana.

‘Since he can't use it many times, it seems that he wanted to create a diversion to end it with his sword.’

With this in mind, Archae'ard began to look for a chance to counter attack as he used his staff to block Sungjin's swords. His sword technique was impressive, but there were still portions that were somewhat predictable.

At the perfect moment, he would stop the human's attack with his staff and counter with magic. This was the Dragon had

planned.

Meanwhile, Sungjin was doing his best to try and memorize every swing of their weapons as they continued to duel.

He never counted on defeating a dragon with a mere fireball. It was used to draw its attention away.

‘The real fight begins after the time reversal.’

That was Sungjin’s true aim. Because the opponent was a blue dragon, he was worried that the dragon might notice his time reversal magic.

He had only one chance. Even with Zhuge Liang’s ‘Increased Mana’ and ‘Desperate Maneuver’, it probably would not be possible to use a class 10 spell twice. So once the close quarter combat progressed to a certain extent, Sungjin resolved himself and intentionally pushed himself away from the fight.

“Illusion”

He used magic to create clones. With five times the Magic Power, the total number of illusions reached twenty which left the dragon Archae’ard in shock. For one thing,

‘He still had more mana?’

the fact that he still had mana at his disposal was surprising. The other was the effectiveness of the spell. No matter how familiar he could get with the opponent’s sword style, that only applied in a one on one situation. If twenty of them were to attack at once, he could face serious danger. The dragon hastily chanted a spell.

“Go away, Gust Wind!”

Five of the clones were blown away. They rose high into the air and disappeared with a ‘poof’ upon landing. But there were still fifteen Sungjins remaining. Archae’ard chanted another spell.

“Fry! Chain Lightning!”

Of the fifteen, seven disappeared with a ‘poof’. Unfortunately,

the original was not among them. The Dragon frowned and cast the final spell.

‘Return! Dispel Magic’

Now only four out of the eight remained. But that was it; even with shortened incantation, there was no more time remaining to cast more spells.

The remaining four Sungjins charged at the Dragon and surrounded him. And together as one, they attacked. The Dragon prepared to face the clones.

Even Archae’ard himself was forced to guess which one was real. He swung his staff and knocked away the Sungjin on the right as he dodged the sword from the front. He was forced to take the attack of the Sungjin to the left and the one in the back. The swords found their mark, but no sounds were made. Only

‘Piff’

the sound of a sword hitting the ground could be heard. The real one was directly in front of him. Archae’ard quickly used his staff to knock the sword away and grabbed Sungjin’s now empty hand. He then confirmed by touch that this one was real.

“Ha ha ha... A reverse psychology. I had guessed that you would choose to come from the front or the right where my staff is.”

Sungjin looked into his eyes and said,

“How smart of you. But the moment you made that guess you already lost.”

Dragon grinned at his words.

“What is this? Bluffing when you’re caught by me?”

The moment the dragon spoke, Sungjin recited a spell greatly condensed by the power of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

“Time reversal.”

Sungjin began to travel back in time. The Dragon let go of his hand then Sungjin began to be hit by magic that the Dragon had cast in reverse order.

‘Dispel Magic’

‘Chain Lightning’

‘Gust Wind’

Each time he was hit, his clones increased. This was the side effect of playing the video backwards. And around the time Sungjin cast the illusion spell, he stopped the time reversal.

Stopping at his convenience rather than be taken to the limits of his mana, he was able to learn that he could control when to stop going back in time with the help of Soldamyr’s experiments. If he wants the time to resume moving forward during time reversal, the spell ends there. Once arriving at the frame of time of his choosing, Sungjin recited the spell again.

“Illusion”

But unlike last time, he felt his body strangely ache.

The Operator said,

[Mana at 0%]

[Desperate Maneuver]

[Health will be consumed instead of Mana]

It seemed that he had used all of his mana with Fireball, Illusion, and Time Reversal. Regardless, Sungjin attempted to recreate the exact same situation as the past. Twenty copies of Sungjin. The real one stood at the very back to prevent himself from being hit by magic.

“Go away! Gust Wind!”

“Fry! Chain Lightning!”

“Return! Dispel Magic!”

After three spells had passed, Sungjin sent the three fakes towards the right, front, and left of the Dragon, while he himself went to the back. Then, they attacked the Dragon as one.

The Dragon, the same as before, avoided the swords of the copies that approached him from the right and in front. The original Sungjin which had circled behind the Dragon struck out heavily with Ariane towards the Dragon's right hand which held the staff.

‘Snick!’

The Dragon's hand was cut away, and the staff that the hand had been holding fell to the ground with a thud. The Dragon looked behind him with wide eyes. His eyes seemed to scream,

‘Not the front, but at the back?!’

Sungjin continued and swung Moon Specter. However, the Dragon held the other hand towards the Moon Specter even as it approached and shouted,

“Let go!”

Sungjin unconsciously dropped Moon Specter that he had been holding. However, he could not let go of this opportunity. Time flowed as if it was in slow motion.

At the same time that he dropped Moon Specter to the ground, Sungjin grasped the sheathed Blood Vengeance and once again raised Ariane towards the sky.

The Dragon was about to shout something, but Sungjin's Ariane was faster. The black sword, whose damage had been upgraded by several times with the activation of the Ring of the Great Sage, swung down on the Dragon's shoulder without mercy. The Dragon's mouth, which was about to chant a spell, let out a shriek instead.

“Kwaaahk!”

At that instant, Sungjin was certain that he had grabbed ahold of

a chance for victory. He took out Blood Vengeance from its sheath as he shouted,

“Besgoro! Frenzy! Yanhurat! Let’s kill him!”

Note:

Just an interesting side note. When the Dragon catches Sungjin, he says this:

“Hu hu hu... 허허실실(虛虛實實) it was.”

With korean phonetics...

“hu hu hu... hu hu shil shil iguna”

Huhushilshil is a tactic/strategy used to disguise the valuables by making it appear as though it is devoid of content (Empty fort strategy used by Zhuge Liang is actually a subset of huhushilshil)

Chapter 159 – Great Plains of Barrastan (10)

Once Sungjin shouted, Besgoro immediately activated Frenzy. At the same time, Yanhurat's voice began to urge Sungjin.

‘Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!’

Sungjin's blood boiled uncontrollably as he swung his sword at the dragon at the speed of light. But still, the Dragon was able to display his fearsome dodging abilities that came about from his experience and instincts. However, even that was not enough.

‘Kill! Kill! Kill! Killllll!’

Sungjin, who grew more and more crazed by Yanhurat's shouts, wielded his swords even faster and struck the Dragon's arms and legs. As he did so, he used the synergy of Besgoro's Frenzy to make his swords move even more rapidly.

It was the combination he had used to lay many foes to rest beginning with the genius swordsman Calian. Amidst this, the Dragon attempted to withstand the pain and chant a spell, but Sungjin's furious blades did not allow him.

*

When Sungjin regained consciousness, a warning came out from the Cube.

[Danger. HP below 10%.]

Sungjin caught his breath as he took off Yanhurat that he had worn around his neck.

“Huk... huk...”

When he turned around, there was an unidentifiable corpse.

‘Incredible! Kei!’

Besgoro's congratulations were followed by Moon Specter's compliments.

‘Good work, Master.’

However, even then, Sungjin could not put his mind to rest.

“Huk... huk...”

As Sungjin caught his breath, he looked at the slab of meat for a few seconds, then finally relaxed.

“Huk... Kuuh... Hem.”

He had used all of his active skills, and his HP, MP, and stamina were all exhausted. He had truly used everything. If the Dragon got up again now, then Sungjin would not be able to deal with it.

“Whew...”

Sungjin let out a sigh as he collapsed on the spot. He couldn’t help but grin. He tried his best to hide it from the ghost to keep up their morale, but earlier when they were exchanging spells and blows, he kept thinking to himself that it was impossible and it could not be done. But in the end, he had done it.

“I did it.”

Sungjin clasped his hands together and shook them once. However, it was at that moment that a bright light suddenly appeared in front of his eyes. A dark blue, almost navy, light.

‘Chiiiiiiiing~’

Sungjin was startled as he looked at that light. When he looked closely, he found that the light appeared from the corpse that he had previously cut up.

The light became brighter and brighter, and then seemed to become a sphere. Sungjin turned his head and gazed at the Operator’s Cube. The Cube which had previously warned him of his low health was silent. It did not announce the customary

‘Hidden Boss Clear!’

“No way...”

As Sungjin trailed off, the sphere finally began to steadily grow bigger. The sphere slowly changed into a spherical figure. A gigantic lizard with wings. That is to say, the figure of a dragon. Even Besgoro, who was always in high spirits was at a loss for words.

‘By God...’

Moon Specter, who always had positive things to say, could not hide her thoughts.

‘How in the world...’

Of course, the most surprised was Sungjin. He had poured out everything and won – no, he had thought that he had won, but everything was for naught. Sungjin wanted to deny what was happening.

However, a dragon of incredible size, one with blue scales, soon appeared in front of Sungjin. Even by roughly estimating the size, he was at least twice as big as Khal Gal. Sungjin looked up at the Dragon. Then, he used Moon Specter to help himself up and said,

“Thank you, Besgoro and Moon specter.”

The two had nothing to say in reply to Sungjin’s words. It seemed that even those two had realized that now there was no chance for victory. The Dragon’s immense eyes flickered downwards and gazed at Sungjin. Sungjin muttered to himself,

“Then, the last fight.”

He said this to the two phantoms as well as to himself. Sungjin held up his two swords. Even if he was to die, he would put up a final resistance. However, at that moment the Dragon said,

“Polymorph, Self.”

Soon, that gigantic body began to coalesce into a single light. Sungjin glared at that light as he continued to hold onto his swords. It was during this that the Operator’s voice suddenly rang

out.

[Congratulations! Hidden Boss]

[Magic Researcher 'Archae'ard' cleared!]

Sungjin blankly looked at the cube. Then he looked back towards that light. The coalescing light had returned into the form of a human; to the form right before they had started their duel. He picked up his staff that had fallen to the ground, and said,

“Return.”

The staff soon disappeared. Then, the Dragon made its way towards Sungjin. Although he had heard the clear notification, Sungjin was still nervous as he watched the Dragon. The figure approached close, then suddenly began to applaud.

‘Clap clap clap’

The sound of his applause spread throughout the vast plains. Sungjin looked at the Dragon up and down. Besgoro muttered,

‘Is he no longer going to attack?’

At that time, the Dragon spoke,

“Amazing. Very Impressive. You’re the first human to forcefully undo my Polymorph. What is your name?”

The Dragon raised his hand and held it out towards Sungjin. Instantly, Sungjin lurched, as if he was about to cut that hand. The Dragon then said,

“Ahh... The fight is over. Human, I no longer have any intention of fighting.”

However, Sungjin did not let down his guard. The Dragon looked at his own hand, then took it back as he said,

“But... It seems you also have no intention to shake hands with me.”

Sungjin did not say anything. The sound of clearing did come out

from the Cube, but he could not move rashly in front of the opponent that he had attempted to kill until just a moment ago. They did not make a promise from the very beginning like he had done with Ariane. The Dragon continued to babble on in front of Sungjin.

“Incredible. Exceptional sword technique and borrowing the power of a legendary omnibus, well... Those were indeed impressive, but... More than anything... Your tenacity was amazing. That glint in your eyes that you shot at me, who had returned to my original form. If it was a normal human, then he would have fallen into despair... To think that you thought of fighting me even then. I had been curious why Ariane had given you something like that... But it seemed like that there was reason to do so.”

Sungjin did not feel particularly happy despite receiving this Dragon’s praise. While Sungjin kept glaring at him, the Dragon suddenly asked.

“By the way... How did you use Time Reversal?”

Sungjin was startled by the Dragon’s question. In Time Reversal, the time flowed backwards only from the user’s perspective. Because of this, others would not be able to remember anything. However, the Dragon knew that Sungjin had used Time Reversal. At this time, the Dragon spoke up, as if he had read Sungjin’s mind.

“You do not have to be so surprised since I am someone born with the blue scales. Furthermore, for the past thousand years, studying magic has been my main diversion.”

The Dragon did not explain in detail, but it was enough to understand a little. According to Soldamyr, originally magic had belonged to Dragons.

Blue, Red, Green, White, Black. He had said that the five colors of magic had originated from the color of the scales of Dragons. As

such, if it was this Dragon, who was a Blue Dragon, then it was natural that he would know some parts of the greatest Blue Magic, Time Reversal. Furthermore, the Operator had said that the Dragon was a 'Magic Researcher'.

“As expected, was it because of that ring? The ring that Ariane gave you?”

Sungjin did not say anything, but the Dragon was able to ask and answer his own questions rather easily.

“As expected. That ring was not a ring that simply increased your Magic Power. What effects does it have?”

Sungjin simply blinked as he stood there, this time as well. The Dragon did not ask again. He simply held his hand out towards Sungjin and muttered something. Once more, Sungjin staggered. No, he did not stagger, but it felt as if he had staggered.

“Oh, oh.... That's how it is.”

Sungjin had felt this before as well. Though he did not know how, it seemed that the Dragon was able to use the palm of his hand to read Sungjin's memories.

“I see. Incredible. To be the item of the Great Sage, Anatol... It truly is... An envious item...”

The Dragon's eyes shone as he looked at the Ring of the Great Sage that Sungjin wore. Despite his handsome appearance, at this moment his expression transformed into an epitome of greed and avarice.

Upon seeing this face, Sungjin, who had just let go of his anxiety, became incredibly tense once more. Though in truth he did not have any chance of winning if they fought for real, but he couldn't just hand it over without trying. However, the Dragon soon gave up on the ring.

“However, as promised before. I will leave that to continue shining on your finger. As Ariane had said, that... is an item that is

directly connected to your fate. In truth, to me, it is simply an antique and does not have much use.”

The Dragon who was enthusiastically carrying on the conversation alone in front of Sungjin suddenly decided to leave.

“Then, farewell. Undergoing Time Reversal, was a rather refreshing experience for me. Though I did not particularly desire for it, but thanks to you, I was able to study something good.”

‘Snap’

The Dragon snapped his thumb and middle finger.

Then suddenly, a long elliptical portal appeared. A portal that looked as if someone had attached a zipper to the air and then opened it. The Dragon extended a leg into the portal. Sungjin kept looking until the end to see if he would leave or not. However, Besgoro then spoke up.

‘What, is this guy leaving without giving anything?’

Now that he had thought about it, this Dragon had not given anything like Ariane had. However, even so, grabbing the Dragon, who was entering the portal, was a laughable thought. Sungjin stood there, torn in hesitation, when the Dragon suddenly said,

“Ah, right. Before when I read your memories, there was something that I was also curious about.”

The figure stood there with one foot in the portal. Sungjin tilted his head as the Dragon continued,

“Why did Edward, at that time, shoot spells at his allies?”

Sungjin unknowingly opened his mouth. Did this Dragon truly look at his entire life in that instant? The Dragon brought back the foot that had crossed into the portal, and once again rambled on.

“There is a topic that I was thinking about recently... If you can know the past in its entirety, then could you not also predict the future in its entirety? Something like that. With that in mind... I’ll

give you this.”

He held his hand in the air, and said,

“Come.”

Soon, above the Dragon’s hand, a pair of sunglasses that seemed to have slightly thick lenses appeared. The Dragon tossed it towards Sungjin. With both of his hands still holding his swords, Sungjin unexpectedly had to hug it.

“And... Perhaps... You will also need this. Come.”

This time, the staff that the Dragon had used earlier appeared. He tossed that to Sungjin as well. Sungjin briefly put down Blood Vengeance as he received the staff in his hand. Having given Sungjin two presents, the Dragon vaguely said,

“If it’s these two, then it should be enough for you to overcome your fate. That is, according to that past of yours that I read.”

Sungjin lowered his vigilance towards the Dragon after having received two presents. He looked at the staff that the Dragon had tossed, more specifically the blue gem embedded in the staff, as he asked,

“You... Didn’t you need this gem?”

“Ahh... I do indeed need it. But I don’t particularly need to obtain it here and now. Those... I’ll need them about three hundred years later. And there will always be wars. Those gems will go around and around and then return to me. Even if you put that in the Cube and take it to ‘Ninety Nine Nights’.”

It seemed that the Dragon even knew about his circumstances in other dimensions. It briefly looked at the Cube.

“That, truly is a foul thing, isn’t it?”

Sungjin, of course, looked at the Cube as well. It was possible that this Cube and the Operator that could be heard from inside it was his ‘tragic fate’.

“However, that definitely... A type of... Then...”

The Dragon muttered to himself as he stood there, and then said,
“Come.”

As expected, something appeared in the air. And, after seeing it, Sungjin was incredibly surprised.

Chapter 160 – Great Plains of Barrastan (11)

The third item that the Dragon Archae'ard took out was a cube. What was particularly surprising was that the cube looked exactly the same as the Operator Cube, except for its size, which was just big enough to fit comfortably in one hand.

“This, I’ve made something like this as well. But with the materials being what they are... I could not make one as big as the one you’re carrying around.”

Sungjin’s mouth opened slightly in shock.

‘You can... Make cubes?’

The Dragon tossed the cube into the air as if it were a ball and then caught it. He continued to toss it into the air as he spoke.

“The first two items that I gave you before... If it’s those... They’ll be of help in helping you overcome your tragic fate.”

The Dragon said the exact same thing that Ariane had said back then. However, Sungjin did not know if the Dragon had repeated the words that he had said previously, or if the Dragon used the same words that he had received by reading his memory.

“And this.”

The Dragon tossed the cube to Sungjin who clumsily received it as he was caught unaware.

“Is keeping tradition.”

“Tradition?”

When Sungjin tilted his head, the Dragon replied,

“That’s right. Tradition.”

The Dragon continued to say incomprehensible words. Sungjin asked,

“What do you mean by that?”

The Dragon answered,

“You know as well. Humans who defeat avaricious dragons... They rescue the kidnapped princess or... Take the treasures in the Dragon’s Lair... Stories like that.”

Sungjin pushed out his lower lip a little. For a main character in the stories to speak of himself in the third person was quite strange.

“Human. Since I lost, I’m giving you a reward.”

Sungjin looked down at the cube. A cube, roughly 5 centimeters in length. If there was something different about it, it was that there was a drawing of a blue dragon letting out a breath on the top face of the cube. Sungjin said to the Dragon,

“I have a bigger cube. Just where am I supposed to use this one?”

The Dragon’s eyes shone once he heard Sungjin’s question. He gestured to the Operator’s Cube as he said,

“That Cube is something you’re using, but it’s not yours. Right?”

Sungjin looked slightly behind him and gazed at the Operator’s Cube. If he thought about it, the Dragon’s words were right. He was using that Cube, but it did not belong to him. Sungjin turned back and was about to nod his head. However, before Sungjin could nod his head, the Dragon continued to speak.

“However, that cube that you’re holding, that one is yours. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“What?”

“Well, just know that this is the case. Anyways, when the time comes, you’ll understand. According to my calculations that is. And... My calculations aren’t often wrong. I’m a true genius after all.”

“What?”

Sungjin once more said ‘What?’, but the Dragon did not give the

answer that he desired. Instead, the Dragon asked for his name.

“Ah right. Now that I think about it. You. What’s your name?”

The Dragon was incredibly self-centered. Angered, Sungjin once more attempted to keep his mouth shut. However, at that moment, the Dragon asked once more. This time, with force.

“What. Is. Your. Name.”

Sungjin attempted to keep his mouth shut, but abnormally, it opened, his tongue moved, and his vocal cords reverberated.

“... Sungjin...”

The Dragon nodded his head as he smiled in satisfaction.

“Ah, I see. Human Sungjin. I don’t know if you heard previously, but my name is Archae’ard. Today was an interesting day. Farewell. I do not know if we will meet again – no, it’s likely we will never meet again. But, I’ll probably recall this meeting once more before I die.”

The Dragon continued to talk by himself like this as he disappeared into the portal that he had opened. At the same time, Besgoro muttered,

‘Kei, so your name is Sungjin?’

Sungjin simply stood there, since Besgoro was someone who could not speak to others. It did not matter if Besgoro knew his name, and furthermore, Besgoro seemed more pleased with Sungjin’s alias than he was with Sungjin’s real name.

‘Sung... Jin... But it’s easier to pronounce Kei. I’ll continue to call you Kei in the future.’

“Sure, go ahead.”

At this moment, having been released from the spell, Cain and Soldamyr urgently ran towards Sungjin.

“Woof Woof!”

“Master!”

Cain, who had been frozen, looked around the area with a slightly nervous look, while Soldamyr examined Sungjin up and down as he asked,

“Were you hurt anywhere?”

Sungjin reassured the two summons.

“Ahh, well... I’m fine. Cain, I’m fine. That Dragon from before left.”

Cain seemed dejected about the fact that he had been frozen the whole time.

“Kuun... Woof.”

Soldamyr spoke as if Sungjin being unhurt was enough,

“I see, what a relief. To fight a Dragon... When I saw him back then, he was incredibly large...”

Sungjin asked about their conditions in turn.

“What about you two? Are you okay?”

Cain vigorously cried out twice,

“Woof Woof!”

Soldamyr said,

“Yes, as I was only briefly ejected into the spirit world... I could not exist in the real world temporarily. I’m fine now.”

Sungjin looked over them. Back then, Rajenta had been dismissed immediately in one blow. However, it was obvious that when he would return to ‘Ninety Nine Nights’, Rajenta would act cutely with his large body while crying,

‘Kyang’

Sungjin now began to examine the items that the Dragon had given him. A pair of bizarre sunglasses, the staff that the Dragon

had used, and an incredibly small cube.

If it were any other time, then he would first put them away and then go through their abilities in detail when he had the time, but right now he was too curious to wait. Sungjin first held up bizarre pair of sunglasses above his head and looked at them.

These sunglasses had odd parts attached to its body, like those VR devices that were trending recently. No, now that he looked at them, it felt like that they were closer to VR devices than sunglasses.

What was as strange apart from its appearance, was its weight. It appeared that the outside and inside of the sunglasses consisted of some kind of metallic substance, but it was light enough that its weight could barely be felt. Soon, the Operator's item description appeared.

Ever Dream – View of Fantasy

Legendary Accessory

Passive Skill

View of Fantasy (I) – Shows what you want to see from inside the gaps between time that has flown past. Only activates when sleeping for longer than 7 hours.

If reality is a dream, and dreams are reality,

Then stories are the only thing remaining to humanity.

Some rather peculiar conditions were attached to it.

‘It can only be activated when sleeping for longer than 7 hours?’

What a stupid condition.

‘It looks like it only activates when you’re sleeping?’

In response to Besgoro's words, Sungjin replied,

“Indeed. I’m going to take you off for a bit, Besgoro.”

Sungjin held his hand to his head and said,

“Remove.”

Soon, Besgoro’s skull, which had been covering half of Sungjin’s face, appeared above his hand. Sungjin now held those sunglasses as he said,

“Equip.”

Suddenly, it became dark. Nothing could be seen.

“What’s this...”

Sungjin raised his hand and took off the sunglasses. The wide Barrastan Plains came into view once more. He then put the sunglasses on again. It became dark. The sunglasses had a permeability of nearly 0%. Sungjin soon realized,

‘This... Rather than sunglasses... Or a VR device... Isn’t it just an eye mask for sleeping?’

In any case, he was unable to use it now. Sungjin placed the eye mask inside the cube. What he picked up next was the long staff – the staff that the Dragon had used. The blue gems that were called sky-whatever were attached on one end. Sungjin held it up and looked at it.

Sereberf – Andal’s staff

Legendary Staff

Passive Skill

Reverse Mana Flow (II) – 10 seconds after using a spell, receive 30% of the mana consumed.

Active Skill

Empower Magic (III) – Temporarily increase Magic Power by 3 times.

Feelings of inferiority and superiority arise from comparison.

Do not think highly of someone who acts conceited after obtaining something,

For that person is someone who has already felt inferiority.

Sungjin looked over the staff. The staff had the same Empower Magic that the 'Ring of the Great Sage' had. But, instead of rank 5, it was rank 3 and only increased magic power by 3 times.

'This... If it was upgraded to Unique Legendary... It should be similar to the Ring of the Great Sage?'

The passive skill of the staff seemed to be better than that of the Ring of the Great Sage.

'For me to use it is a bit... But if I give it to another Chosen One...'

When Sungjin thought this, he recalled the 'Chosen Ones' that he had forgotten about for a while.

'Ah right... Are they doing well?'

This raid was not easy. If they did not perform the infiltration mission properly in the beginning, then they could fall into danger. There had not been a request for summon yet, but he should still go and help them as fast as possible. Sungjin put the staff into the cube as well.

'I should quickly eliminate the surviving soldiers and then go through the other dimensions...'

But still, he felt that he should check the last remaining mini cube. Of the three items that the Dragon Archae'ard had gifted him in the beginning, the cube was what he was most curious about. Sungjin quickly held the cube up.

Plasmic Cube

Normal Accessory

Passive Skill

Possession (I) – Keep the item that is inside the cube.

I, Archae'ard, was born a genius and was able to understand the logic of the world when I was 100 years old,

And when I was 1000 years old there was already nothing that I did not know. At this time, I just had a single dream...

‘What is this...’

Sungjin looked at the cube with incredibly disappointed eyes. A ‘normal’ accessory. There was nothing in particular to explain. He already knew about the passive skill. Furthermore, the Dragon bragged about himself in the item description at the bottom.

‘Before, when he took this out and said it was tradition or what not... He made quite a big deal about it... But with this, how is it any different from my cube?’

Sungjin thought as such, but he did not have a lot of time to ponder on the issue. He had been delayed far too long by the Dragon’s rambling and by checking the items that he had received from it.

Sungjin placed the mini cube into the Operator Cube and then re-equipped Besgoro. Afterwards, he went over to Cain and said,

“Cain, it’s time for you to take an active part. Call your subordinates and find the remaining enemies.

The moment he finished speaking, Cain let out a long howl.

“Awooooooooooooo~”

Soon, the figures of his subordinates appeared in Barrastan Plains.

“Woof! Woof!”

At Cain’s command, they spread throughout the area. After watching them, Sungjin said to Soldamyr,

“Soldamyr, take me up. I used all of my mana in the previous

fight.”

Soldamyr lifted Sungjin into the air without delay.

“Defy Gravity! Flight!”

Sungjin’s body soon rose into the sky. He then watched Cain and his comrades running through the plains from above. There would be enemies in the direction that they headed.

As he followed behind the wolves while flying slowly in the sky, Sungjin thought,

‘I’ll finish this quickly, then go help my allies.’

Chapter 161 – Great Plains of Barrastan (12)

“Whew...”

Serin breathed in deeply, then pulled back the bowstring. The target was a large demon in the middle of a team of demons. It appeared to be the leader.

Though he seemed to be two heads taller than the other demons, it would not be easy to hit him because the distance between them was too far. By her estimation, they were about 200 meters apart.

It was a distance that was three times that of the farthest distance used in women’s archery, which was 70 meters. Even if it was her, she did not know if she could hit the target with one shot.

Serin briefly looked around. Nine hunters and their eighteen eyes were all fixed upon her. She had completed numerous raids until now, but intense moments like these were rather rare.

They had successfully completed the guerilla warfare, and it was now time for the fight against the main encampment. However, the size of the main encampment was larger than they had imagined. They had racked their brains for a way to start the fight, before all agreeing to have the incredibly skilled archer Hassan, who Serin had transformed into, start things off by wounding the enemy commander.

That is why things had turned out this way. Serin aimed towards the enemy commander and pulled her bowstring taut. The arrow quivered as if it were going to be fired immediately. However, after a brief moment, Serin lowered her bow and shook her head. She did not have any confidence.

“Haah...”

She unconsciously let out a sigh. At that moment, Edward, who was standing next to her, patted her shoulder as he said,

“Don’t be so nervous. You’ll be fine with your level of skill.”

Serin stared at him. Edward often spoke encouraging words to others.

‘He sure seems like a rather decent person... However, Sungjin-oppa would not say something like that without reason...’

By the time they kill the regular boss and try to find the Hidden Piece, Sungjin would have finished the entire raid and would definitely be looking to see if the other hunters were doing well. Also, he would certainly be able to recognize Edward who was standing next to her. Regardless of whether Serin called him or not, the chance of Sungjin coming here was high.

‘Well... It should be fine if I find out the details when they meet.’

Serin kept this in mind as she once more pulled back on her bowstring. The target was definitely far away even when she looked at it again. However, she had to erase all thoughts of it being ‘far away’ in order to land a shot on it. After a few seconds of concentrating without any distracting thoughts, Serin let go of the bowstring.

‘Pew~’

The arrow that flew from her bow drew out a long curve. Her arrow was rather fast, but because of the distance, it still flew for a relatively long time for about 2~3 seconds.

‘Gulp’

The sound of someone swallowing their spit could be heard. After a brief moment,

‘Thud’

With a sound, one of the demon’s head was knocked backwards. It was a head shot. Soon, a voice rang out simultaneously from the hunters’ cubes.

[Warning!]

[Boss monster 'Zeratar' has appeared!]

Now it was a head-on fight. The hunters fell into their formation. Amongst the hunters, Serin was still the busiest.

“Over there!”

She shot an arrow into the mouth of a demon who was pointing at them and shouting.

‘Pew~~ Thud’

The other long-range attacker, Edward, began to chant a spell.

“I beckon thee god of destruction from far reaches of space. Come! Meteor Strike!”

When he finished the spell, another sun appeared in the vast skies. It steadily came closer, until it finally revealed itself to be a meteorite flying at incredible speeds.

“Spell! It’s a Spell!”

Soon, a few ‘Anti-Magic Shells’ were cast above the enemy position. The gigantic meteorite fell on top of them.

‘Boooooooooooooom!!!!!’

An massive amount of dust flew into the air along with the enormous explosion.

‘Cough, cough’

Each of the hunters in the front held out their hands in order to block the dust. Serin also briefly let go of her bow string and lowered the goggles that were located on the top of her head.

The name of the goggles was ‘Rakrua’. It was an item that had a passive skill that allowed one to identify the movement of living beings through their body heat.

Countless crimsons figures could be seen scrambling about inside the chaos. They had to reduce the numbers of the enemy as much as they could before they clashed head-on. Serin aimed at them as

she continuously released arrows.

‘Pew!’

‘Pew!’

‘Pew!’

However, the enemies steadily came closer to the hunters. Serin took off her goggles after firing arrows for a while. The dust that covered the plains began to clear out, and the approaching demon army could be clearly seen.

There were hundreds of soldiers. Even after being hit by the meteorite that Edward summoned, there was an incredible number of demons remaining. Serin wondered,

‘Can we win?’

It had been a while since she had thought like this – the last time was way back when she had met the Hidden Boss of the Dragon’s Lair, a scary lady with crimson eyes. Unconsciously, Serin found herself looking at the other skilled person, Edward. After casting Meteor Strike, Edward had sat cross-legged and closed his eyes.

“Meditation.”

Serin turned her gaze back towards the enemies. When she was about to draw back her bowstring, she recalled Sungjin’s words.

‘Don’t aim for the Hidden Boss. That’s too dangerous. You should utilize everything you have in the Boss fight.’

She took out ‘One Thousand and One Nights’ from under her clothes. When she opened the book, a new passage was written. Serin began to read it aloud without hesitation.

“The Roc was a bird large enough to be able to cast a shadow on an entire valley. It fed mainly on elephants...”

At that time, the sound of someone reading next to her could be heard.

“Thor, the God of Thunder, was a peerless warrior. He wielded Mjolnir, the Hammer of Thunder, and Megingjord, the Belt of Strength...”

Two members owned legendary omnibuses in a single party. As Serin read the final sentence, she felt a little relieved.

*

“Woof! Woof Woof!”

As he flew while following Cain’s voice, Sungjin was able to see a team of demons that were gathered together. They were already fighting with Cain’s wolves who had run in front.

“Woof! Woof!”

“What’s with these damned mutts! Where did they come from?”

Upon seeing this, Sungjin simply said,

“Soldamyr.”

Soldamyr snapped his fingers, and Sungjin, who had been flying at low-altitude, began to free-fall. He landed on the ground and rolled once.

“What... What’s that?”

“It’s that guy from before!”

Upon seeing Sungjin, the demons were split between those who stood their ground

“Revenge for the Commander!”

And those who wanted to flee.

“Ru... Run away!”

There was already a rule that had been set for this. Sungjin fought the demons that wanted to fight him, while Cain and Soldamyr fought against the demons that wanted to flee.

“Woof Woof!”

“Hand of Dead.”

There was a total of four demons that charged toward Sungjin. However, Sungjin had already fought against an enemy force of over a hundred demons, as well as an old Dragon just a short time ago.

To him, these four demons were like eating a cake after having eaten the main dish. Sungjin easily dominated the demons and moved forwards. He sliced the throats of the first two demons that approached with one strike. The third demon that came just had a single chance to attack, but Sungjin leaned backwards and used Moon Specter to block it.

‘Clang’

Afterwards, he fluidly turned once and used Blood Vengeance with his right hand to pierce through the demon’s heart.

“Kuh...”

The fourth demon, who saw all of this, lost his will to fight. Though he was one of the four demons that had enthusiastically charged, he revealed his back and began to flee. However, Cain appeared out of nowhere and swooped down on the demon.

“Woof!”

“Aaaahh!”

Cain pinned down the demon’s arms with his front paws, before gruesomely tearing out the demon’s throat with his teeth. With that, the nearby demons were annihilated. In order to maintain the current speed, Sungjin immediately said to Soldamyr,

“Soldamyr, let’s go.”

However, Cain called out to Sungjin.

“Woof Woof.”

“Hrm?”

When Sungjin tilted his head, an alarm rang out from the Operator's Cube.

[Congratulations. Raid 100% complete]

[Beginning reward distribution.]

[Monsters slain. Demon...]

"Aah, we're finished. Cain, Soldamyr. Great job."

At Sungjin's words, Cain approached Sungjin and rubbed its head against him, while Soldamyr bowed his head.

"It's my pleasure."

[Ahtrin – The Prince's Flag]

[Luyo – The Blind Man's Lost Shoe]

Sungjin took a brief glimpse at the items that appeared before placing them inside the Cube.

[Congratulations! Legendary Item...]

Each of the items that he received was of the Legendary-tier, but Sungjin did not find anything that seemed to be worth using. Rather using them himself, he thought about his allies as he picked them up.

'This... Mahadas should be able to put it to good use.'

[Last but not the least, you will be awarded titles you've earned on this raid.]

[Executioner – Deal 3x damage to enemies that have less than 10% HP remaining.]

It was not likely that decent titles would appear now. It might be because even though he had a similar level of performance, he had already received all the better titles. After having finished distribution, the Operator's voice could be heard.

[Returning to the Hunter's Hall in 1 mi...]

Sungjin spoke up before it finished speaking.

“Ahh, Operator. I’ll return at the original time.”

The Operator then changed the time.

[Returning to the Hunter’s Hall in 1 hour and 52 minutes.]

If it was 1 hour and 52 minutes, then he should be able to help the other hunters safely finish their raids. And if he had some time left after that, then he could also go troll hunting. Having finished everything in his own dimension, Sungjin took out the Sceptre of the Warlord from the Cube. He was curious about how his allies were doing.

“Inspection”

Soon, the figures of five hunters began to appear in front of Sungjin’s eyes. The hunters were still engaged in guerilla warfare. They were doing well. The guerilla warfare, in the beginning, could decide victory or defeat in the boss fight. He had also told them,

‘Proceed as carefully as you can.’

However, when he looked closely, one party, Serin’s, seemed a bit strange. Instead of being on the lookout for demons, they were searching along the riverside where he had previously met the Dragon. This appearance suggested that they were searching for the Hidden Piece after killing the normal Boss.

‘No way? Did they already kill the boss?’

Serin’s party was usually the fastest to clear the raids. Not only was she incredibly skilled, but she also held one of the three ‘Unique Legendary’ books, ‘Arabian Nights’. If you included a good party, it was not an impossible thing.

‘I guess... Things turned out well.’

It seemed that he did not have to worry about Serin from here on. Though she still had the Hidden Boss remaining, with his

current condition he was unable to help her. Also, it was likely that nothing would happen since he had told them,

‘If you meet the Hidden Boss, don’t challenge him and just run.’

Since one member had safely finished the raid, he could concentrate on the other four members. Sungjin was about to leave her alone and turn his attention to the other hunters, when at that moment, he sensed that something was out of place.

‘What was that?’

He looked once more at Serin’s monitor. And at that time, he finally discovered it. The person standing next to Serin, Edward.

Chapter 162 – Great Plains of Barrastan (13)

“Caaw! Caaw!”

Above the battlefield, a single immense bird was flying around. It was a ‘Roc’ that had been summoned by Serin through ‘Arabian Nights’.

The book’s description of the ‘Roc’ being able to grasp an elephant with one claw was brought directly to life as it flew around the skies. The bird’s beak pecked at the demons, and its claws grasped a handful of them and dropped them after flying about.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

The demons that fell from the skies died after breaking their hips and twisting their necks. In the middle of the battlefield, the figure of a man could be seen shouting.

“Uowooooooooaaaaah!”

The name of the man was ‘Thor’, the god Edward summoned by using ‘Myths of Northern Europe’. He wielded a lightning-clad hammer and was sweeping away the enemies.

On occasion, one or two demons would stab the man with a spear or slice him with a sword, but he would continue to slaughter the demons without a single wound. Thanks to the two summons the enemy army could not maintain their formation.

During this time, the hunters charged at the enemy commander Zeratar. They believed that if they could kill the enemy commander, the remaining enemies would lose their will to fight. Serin was the only one to stay behind as she continued to shoot arrows.

‘Pew!’

‘Pew!’

‘Peeww!’

Serin was unable to rest even a second between each arrow since the fight had begun. She had shot tens of thousands of arrows since she started archery from a young age. However, this was the first time she had shot so many arrows in one sitting.

Her breath became ragged, her shoulder began to ache and her arms burned. However, she could not rest. At the front, the hunters had begun to fight with the Boss monster.

Her job was to prevent the other monsters from approaching. If her arrows stopped, then the hunters would be surrounded. With this in mind, she shot arrows while falling into a near trance-like state. Finally, a long-awaited sound could be heard.

[Boss monster Commander ‘Zeratar’ Cleared]

The moment the enemy commander died, the demons were all busy fleeing away. Nevertheless, Serin continued to shoot arrows without taking a break.

‘Pew!’

Every time an arrow flew through the air, another demon would collapse on the spot. It was only after that the demons had nearly disappeared from view that her arm stopped drawing back the bowstring like a machine. Just when the fight was finished, and she could finally let go of the tense anxiety, an urgent voice could be heard from amidst the hunters.

“Hey, over here!”

She turned her head and saw the hunters gathered at one spot. Serin shouldered her bow and ran towards them. There, the hunter ‘Juggernaut’ lay collapsed. Though there were no wounds to be seen, he was unconscious.

‘Is he dead?’

The moment Serin thought this, the man’s Cube said,

[Warning. Low HP. HP below 20%]

He was not dead yet. When she looked closely, there was a small dagger that was stabbed into his side.

“Back then, the Boss stabbed him before he died.”

Now that she looked at it, the wound was tinged with a strange purplish color. Someone said,

“The dagger is poisoned. We have to remove it.”

A hunter grasped the dagger, then pulled it out. Soon, blood began to gush out from the wound. As this was happening, one of the hunters took out a potion and held it to the ‘Juggernaut’s lips.

A ‘special’ grade HP recovery potion. It was an expensive potion that cost 1000 Black Coins. However, despite this, the Cube’s voice could be heard once again.

[Warning. Incredibly low HP. HP below 10%]

Someone added from behind,

“It’s an extremely deadly poison, just using potions won’t work. Does no one have an antidote?”

Serin took out an antidote from her belt. This was, of course, a ‘special’ grade antidote. It was an expensive antidote that could neutralize nearly every kind of poison. The hunter who received it threw it into the mouth of the ‘Juggernaut’. However, at that moment, he began to cough up blood.

‘Cough!’

“He’s bleeding too much. He’ll die at this rate.”

While the hunters were unable to do anything, Serin unconsciously looked for Edward. If it was him, then there might be something that he could do. When Serin turned her head, she found him slightly apart from the hunters, meditating with his eyes closed. Serin wanted to shake him awake and say,

‘This isn’t the time for this!’

However, when she approached him, he opened his eyes. When Serin hesitated slightly, he rose up from his spot, moved past her and said to the hunters,

“Please move aside.”

When Edward appeared, the hunters wordlessly move aside for him. Edward looked at the wound, then touched his ring once as he said,

“Specialize: White.”

Soon, the color of the ring that he was wearing became white. He placed his hand on the ‘Juggernaut’s’ wound and chanted a spell.

“By the Power of God, Save this one. God’s Hand.”

Soon, a brilliant light began to shine from his hand.

*

“It’s all thanks to you, Mr. Edward. Truly, thank you.”

“It was nothing. Don’t worry.”

While they were searching for the Hidden Piece, the revived ‘Juggernaut’ kept expressing his thanks to Edward. He had been unable to move because the poison was a type of paralysis poison, but he was able to see what everyone was doing. He kept bowing his head as he said,

“When we receive the raid distribution this time, I’ll reimburse you no matter what.”

“You don’t need to do something like that...”

“Nonsense. You saved me even though your raid rewards would be reduced.”

There was a reason why the ‘Juggernaut’ was so truly thankful to Edward. In this raid, until they killed the Boss, they were allies who had bled together. However, after killing the boss, they were

people who split the raid reward. In truth, there were a few who were going to leave him alone when they saw him dying. But in spite of this, Edward had sacrificed this chance to save him.

The ‘Juggernaut’ also approached Serin and expressed his thanks.

“Mister Hassan as well, I saw you give me an antidote. Thank you.”

“Ah... No problem.”

Serin just nodded her head a few times. In truth, she was focused on something else.

‘Should I be calling Sungjin oppa now?’

Serin called out to the Operator and checked the remaining time.

“Operator, the remaining time?”

[Returning to the Hunters Hall in 2 hours and 20 minutes.]

There was a total of 3 hours and 30 minutes for the raid, so the amount of time that had elapsed was 1 hour and 10 minutes. Exactly $\frac{1}{3}$ of the time had passed. This was way past $\frac{1}{5}$ of the total raid time, which was when Sungjin had said that they could call him. In fact, it was strange that Sungjin hasn’t already come by this point. Serin thought about it in detail.

‘If it’s by this time, then even before I call him... He should have already arrived... Did he not finish the raid yet?’

When she thought about, this seemed to be the case. Not only was there the difficulty of the current raid, but the Great Plains were incredibly vast. Because of this, no matter how Sungjin tried, it would take time for him to obtain 100% completion. Serin finally came to a decision.

‘If oppa had finished the raid... Then... He would have come here before I could even call him.’

Because of this, she decided to wait for Sungjin to come instead of

calling him. If he finished his raid, then he would immediately use ‘Inspection’, and then quickly appear here. Now, she had to consider what to do when Sungjin arrived.

‘Mr. Edward seems like a rather good person... Why would Sungjin-oppa hate someone like Edward so much?’

While Serin was pondering the issue, one of the hunters in the front shouted,

“Hey! Look here!”

Serin lifted her head and looked in front. Two of the hunters were dragging out a corpse from the edge of the stream.

“Isn’t there something strange about this corpse?”

“Indeed.”

There was a total of four with the title ‘Treasure Hunter’ among the ten hunters. After the raid was over, they naturally searched for the Hidden Piece. Their efforts finally bore fruit.

“Hey, inside his chest. You can see a blue light.”

“Let’s cut open his stomach.

Serin stood slightly apart from them as she watched the scene. Soon, a voice could be heard from the Operator’s Cube.

[Congratulations! You have obtained the Hidden Piece]

[‘Elendil’s Final Preparation’]

“Oh oh! It’s a gem!”

“We actually found it!”

However, while the hunters were excitedly celebrating after finding the Hidden Piece, a person suddenly appeared from the sky.

‘Thud!’

Serin briefly looked at him.

‘Is it Sungjin oppa?’

However, the man that appeared was about a head taller than Sungjin. An unknown handsome man. The hunters’ gazes were drawn to the man. At that moment, the man spoke,

“Look here humans. Hand that over.”

The hunters were briefly bewildered but soon prepared to fight. Even Serin took out her bow. However, the man then added,

“Are you wanting to fight me? You’ll die.”

‘We’ll die?’

With just one sentence, Serin could feel that her body had suddenly begun stiffening. However, despite this, she took out an arrow and nocked it on her bowstring. Afterwards, she glanced at the other hunters from the corner of her eye.

The hunters were simply unable to move. Of them, only Edward was moving slightly backwards. If it was like this, then they wouldn’t be able to fight. At this moment, the man looked towards Serin, then said,

“Put down that arrow, pretty one. If you don’t want to be hurt, that is.”

Serin was surprised. It was as if the man could see past the mask and see her true self. When she unconsciously lowered her bow, the man continued on saying,

“Humans. I’ll say it only once so listen well. If you hand over the gem, I’ll let you live. If you don’t hand it over, you’ll die. Which do you choose?”

It was then that the other hunters realized that he was not a normal man. Seeing that he called them ‘humans’, it could be that he might be the Hidden Boss that was talked about in the opening verse. The hunters turned their heads and looked at Serin and Edward since these two were the strongest. It seemed like they

were asking the two to make the decision. Serin recalled what Sungjin had said during every breakfast.

‘Don’t fight against the Hidden Bosses of 10 man raids.’

She said to the hunters,

“We... We’ll hand it over.”

Edward also nodded his head wordlessly. The hunters handed the gem over to the man.

“Hrm. Hrm. Good. What smart humans.”

After approaching the hunters and snatching the gem away from them, he bid them farewell.

“You did a good job finding it for me. Then, I’m off.”

The man opened a blue portal in the air,

“Open.”

And then disappeared inside of it.

“Whew...”

The moment the man disappeared, all of the hunters let out a long breath. Although it was for just a short moment, it had been difficult to breathe even though they were just facing him. One of the hunters said,

“That guy... Was the Hidden Boss, right?”

“He should be. That oppressive feeling... I don’t think he’s human?”

“But, that guy took the Hidden Piece!”

“I know, right? What a despicable person.”

While the hunters were conversing, suddenly a column of light appeared from the sky. The hunters who were startled by the Hidden Boss just a moment ago were alarmed once again.

“Wha... What’s that?”

Except for Serin. This was because she had already seen this several times. Soon, Sungjin's figure appeared in the column of light. However, his two swords were already unsheathed, as if he were about to swing them right now. Serin saw this and thought, 'What do I do?'

Chapter 163 – Great Plains of Barrastan (14)

Sungjin was teleported to a new dimension along with a bright light. Far away, he could see Edward and Serin among the hunters. Sungjin rotated his wrists while holding two of his swords.

Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance cut through the air. Sungjin waited for the lights to disappear, like a sprinter at the start line waiting for the gun signal to begin.

And as soon as it disappeared, he ran towards Edward. When the hunters saw Sungjin charge towards them at high speeds, they were greatly shocked.

“W...what?”

While the hunters were still stunned and unable to react, Sungjin immediately targeted Edward. But, the only person who knew what was going on, Serin, tried to stop him.

“Please wait!”

She shouted. Sungjin ignored her and charged against Edward.

“Whoa...”

The other hunters didn’t know what was going on, but they moved out of the way first. Edward himself was also unaware that he had become a target. He backstepped because Sungjin was running aggressively in his direction. Sungjin used Besgoro to recite an incantation.

“Frost Bite!”

Edward’s feet became rooted. Sungjin planned on splitting him in half then and there. Edward must be eliminated, even if that means he must become a troll. But moments before Sungjin’s sword was about to reach his forehead.

“Bolt Charge!”

Someone had jumped in to knock Sungjin away. Sungjin had been too focused on Edward that he was caught off guard, but spinning mid-air, he landed on his feet and saw that the ‘Juggernaut’ was standing next to Edward with his shield like a personal guard.

‘It’s already after distribution. What a strong sense of camaraderie,’ Sungjin had thought.

Edward aimed a spell towards him.

“Glacial wall encase the enemy! Ice Cage”

Soon a tall wall of ice surrounds Sungjin.

“Back to formation!”

Thanks to the moment’s respite, the hunters reorganized themselves and decided to worry about the reasons later. It was an instinctual reaction to being attacked suddenly without knowing what Sungjin was doing. The barrier around Sungjin did not last long.

‘Pow!’

Two swords came through the wall of ice at the same time.

‘Creeeak~’

Then with an ominous noise, it cut a circular hole through the ice.

‘Boom’

The circular portion fell forward and landed on the ground. Sungjin himself walked out of the circular exit he had created. Before him was a line of hunters in battle formation. Tanks in the front, Damage Dealers in the second row, Magician Edward was naturally in the back; a textbook formation. Only Serin who knew Sungjin was hesitating standing off to the side. Sungjin addressed them.

“My target is the Magician in the back. If you do not stop me, I

will not attack you. But if you get in my way, be prepared to die. Choose.”

The hunters turned to look at Edward. Edward looked just as confused as the rest of them. The hunters then briefly exchanged glances and turned back towards Sungjin. It seemed right to protect their comrade, but they didn't understand why this was happening. It was then,

“What are you? Are you a troll?”

The Juggernaut who had saved Edward earlier walked forward and demanded.

“Why have you tried to attack us?”

Sungjin replied,

“I will repeat myself. My target is the Magician in the back. I don't care about the rest of you.”

“Who cares about what you think. We are a team. If you wish to attack Mister Edward, you will have to face us all.”

Sungjin glared at him. And lifting up both his swords, he stated,

“Do whatever you want... everyone who stops me will die.”

The Juggernaut scoffed. He turned his head to look at his team as he said,

“Everyone? We're ten people.”

The Juggernaut had spoken with confidence. They were a successful party that completed a 10 man raid perfectly. The opponent was only a single hunter. He was no boss nor hidden boss; simply another hunter.

He was certain that if they were to work together and fight, then they could definitely win. Especially because their team had the unbelievable Magician Edward and expert sniper Hassan. But then he noticed that Hassan was not in formation. It was as if Hassan didn't think that this fight involved him. The Juggernaut did think

something was strange, but he nevertheless returned his gaze and said,

“Do you really think you can face all ten of us?”

Sungjin crossed his blades as he said,

“Why don’t you try.”

The battle was imminent.

“Oppa! Please don’t do this!”

It was none other than Serin’s voice. All the hunters turn to look at Serin who was in the appearance of Hassan. The voice was that of a man, but the speech pattern was that of a woman. Noticing strange gazes upon her, she pulled the beard down as she said,

“Unequip.”

The skin on her face peeled off and Serin returned to her original appearance. All the hunters were shocked. Firstly, because a person they had believed to be a man all this time (even though the silhouette of the body had been quite feminine) turned out to be a woman. Secondly, because the woman was unbelievably beautiful. Serin put away the ‘Hassan’ mask she had purchased from the Raccoon Merchant and said,

“Oppa, please wait.”

But Sungjin was in no mood to listen.

“Stay aside. It’s dangerous.”

“I’ve had a chance to speak with him, and he’s a very reasonable person. If you just speak with him...”

Serin tried to calm the situation down, but Sungjin didn’t even want to listen.

“I know.”

He cut her off mid-sentence.

“I know that if you speak with him, he will seem alright. But

there is something you do not know. Obey me and stay out of it.”

“No wait, Oppa.”

It was at this moment when Serin had Sungjin’s attention,

“Yaa!”

One of the hunters, ‘Master Chef’ appeared in the air behind Sungjin. He had a dagger in both hands. His assassination skill was so great that in the first guerrilla phase of this round, his contribution was on par with Serin and Edward. When Serin saw him appear, she shouted,

“No!”

But it was too late. He aimed for Sungjin’s neck and swung his daggers.

‘Stab’

His daggers ended up stabbing Sungjin. But even the ‘Master Chef’ who had launched the attack was shocked. The ‘Master Hunter’ had been facing away from him until a moment ago. But what he hit wasn’t his neck but his forearm.

He couldn’t believe his eyes. To him, it had appeared as if an arm grew where the neck had been a moment ago.

“Wha...”

While he was still reeling in surprise, Serin said to the ‘Master Chef’,

“Run Curtis! He’s not someone...”

But it was too late. Red aura enveloped his body. Sungjin did not hesitate in swinging his sword.

‘Spapat’

Along with the sound,

“Ack!”

A cross-shaped wound appeared on his body, spewing a stream of blood. Serin shouted at Sungjin once more.

“Oppa!”

For the first time, Sungjin spoke to her with anger.

“You... Do you intend to join the side of my enemy because you’ve been in a party with him just once?”

Serin wasn’t able to respond. It was then the Juggernaut readied his shield and mace.

“Uryah!”

He shouted and charged towards Sungjin. The other hunters hesitated for a moment more, but they followed Juggernaut’s lead to attack Sungjin. Most of them were probably thinking.

‘It’s 8 versus 1, how can we possibly lose?’

But their thoughts were ruthlessly shattered in just a few seconds. The Juggernaut at the front who had charged at Sungjin suddenly lost sight of him.

‘Where?’

And the moment he was thinking so, he saw the sky spinning. Sungjin had kicked his legs out from under him.

‘Bam’

He fell with a sound. He tried to get up quickly when

‘Clang!’ there was a loud sound.

When he looked up, his Mace was broken. The Master Hunter had tripped him and broken his mace with the sword at the same time. He stared at the Mace that was reduced to just the handle in disbelief.

‘No way, my Legendary mace...?’

But seeing the next few moments of the fight, this was nothing to be surprised about. The ‘Mountain’ who freely used a giant two-

handed sword swung his weapon down towards the ‘Master Hunter’. The ‘Master Hunter’ didn’t even try to dodge it and blocked with his thin weapon instead.

The Mountain’s two-handed sword was more aptly described as a lump of steel than a sword; it was a gigantic and fearsome looking weapon. The Juggernaut expected the Master Hunter to become flattened by the weapon just like that.

‘Claaang!’

But, after a loud collision, the only thing that remained was the Master Hunter’s thin and red blade. The Mountain was so shocked that he couldn’t move. The Master hunter used that timing to kick the Mountain’s groin.

‘Splat’

Along with a strange sound, the Mountain fell while holding his crotch. The ‘Serial Killer’ and ‘Elite Samurai’ charged against him as well. They were the fastest members of the team who wielded a sword and an axe. The two of them attacked the Master Hunter faster than the other members could see with their eyes, but

‘Clang! Clang! Clang! Shing!’

After just a few hits, both of them dropped their precious weapons and moaned in pain.

“Ugh!”

“Ooh...”

They stepped back, holding the arms which held the weapons earlier. Blood dripped from each of their wrists. Now the only ones defending Edward was ‘Hawkeye’ with a crossbow and ‘Royal Guard’ with a spear. Things were getting dangerous.

Juggernaut abandoned his stump of a mace and picked up his shield to join the others when a powerful gust of wind materialized below the Master Hunter’s feet. Edward must have begun an

incantation while the others were fighting.

“Cyclone!”

Master Hunter lost his balance due to the sudden wind. The cyclone grew in size until it flung him somewhere far away. Edward quickly said,

“Please gather here!”

The others were already used to following his commands. Edward quickly addressed the hunters who assembled next to him.

“What I’ve used just now is simply a control magic to throw him away. He will return for sure.”

The moment he finished, he followed up with a spell.

“Sprouting Lifeforce, to me. Rejuvenation”

With Edward at the epicenter, a bright green light radiated outward. The wounds they sustained from the Master Hunter were healed in moments. The now healed hunters all~

“Operator, potions!”

“Operator, what weapons do I have?”

~Called upon the Operator to rearm themselves and prepare. But then Edward shouted,

“Here he comes, he’s coming faster than expected.”

And just as he said, the Master Hunter who had been flung away by wind returned without a scratch and walked up to the Hunters. The Hunters reassumed their formation. Master Hunter Sungjin frowned as he addressed them.

“There’s eight of you. Even I cannot win ‘without accidentally killing you’. I will say this one last time. Everyone with the exception of Spell Master, get lost. Or you will die.”

Chapter 164 – Great Plains of Barrastan (15)

At Sungjin's sharp words, the Hunters took a moment to give each other glances. It was for just a few seconds, but they could already know instinctively.

'This man could kill all of us if he wanted. The reason why he hasn't already is because of his own reasons.'

And because of it, they felt less and less inclined to protect Edward. Reading the Hunters' body language, Sungjin repeated himself assertively.

"One more time, I have no interest in anyone other than that Magician. I don't wish to create collateral damage. Get out of my way, and nothing will happen to the rest of you."

Now Sungjin's words caused a divide among the Hunters. The will to fight plummeted and the hands that held the weapons were loosened. Sungjin smiled inwardly. But then he heard Ed's voice from the back.

"Who are you? Why are you attacking me?"

Sungjin didn't give much of an answer.

'Sins of your previous life.'

It wasn't like he could give that reasoning.

"Please let's talk it out. I don't want to cause trouble to other hunters. Please put down your weapon."

Sungjin found himself relaxing hearing those words. Edward wouldn't have remembered what he had done in the last life, but there was a thing or two he had wanted to hear before killing him.

"Rawr!"

There was a sudden roaring of a beast. Sensing something was going on, Sungjin quickly made his way towards the hunters.

Seeing Sungjin suddenly dash forward, the hunters couldn't react and just stood in place. Sungjin gritted his teeth.

‘So annoying.’

He put away the Moon Specter and pulled it back out as he said,

“Ghastly Wail”

“Kyaaa!”

Moon Specter began to screech once freed from the scabbard. Like Moses splitting the Red Sea, Moon Specter scattered the hunters and revealed Edward in the back. He was mounted on top of a great Siberian Tiger.

His request for talking it out must have not been out of his desire for peaceful resolution, but to buy time to summon the tiger. Sungjin quickly ran towards him.

But just one hunter, Juggernaut, stood in his way. He stood stoically in spite of the screeching Moon Specter. He must have some sort of defense against fear as a tank.

He completely gave up on attack and had only the shield in his hands as he stood in Sungjin's way. Sungjin was going to ignore him and go around, but then the Juggernaut took out a strange stone statue.

It was a strange helix shaped twist coming out of a flat plate-like surface. And on it was a smear of blood. Sungjin had thought the statue had a curious appearance, but he had no time to be wasting on it at the moment.

“Damn it, move!”

But then the Juggernaut used the timing when Sungjin moved past him to say,

“Guidance of the Old Gods”

The active skill was activated, and then the stone statue began to sprout octopus-like tentacles which came flying towards Sungjin.

Sungjin cut the tentacles apart with a single strike, but he accidentally let one pass his guard, and it wrapped around his heels. Sungjin shouted,

“What is this?”

He cut the tentacle in irritation, but the severed tentacle continued to hang on as if it was still alive. Sungjin was filled with wrath, and he completely cut it down to pieces. But the stone statue continued to spill forth more tentacles. Enraged, Sungjin cut away all the tentacles trying to grab at him and effortlessly broke the statue.

‘Kheehe...’

The statue gave off a strange cry. Once the statue was broken, the Tentacles holding onto Sungjin lost their vitality and withered on the spot. Sungjin glared at the Juggernaut as if he were going to kill him.

Juggernaut who even withstood the shrieking of Moon Specter found himself instinctively backtracking when he saw Sungjin’s expression. Sungjin turned to look at Edward. While Juggernaut was buying time, Edward had managed to put a large distance between them with the help of the tiger.

Sungjin paused to look down at his belt, but there were no more items available for himself to use. He had already consumed them all during the fight with Dragon Arcaiard. Sungjin began to run towards Edward on his feet as he called Serin.

“Serin”

He only said her name, but Serin knew why Sungjin was calling her. He had wanted her to shoot down the Tiger Ed was riding. But Serin did not raise her bow. She just pretended to play dumb.

“W...what is it oppa?”

She asked. Sungjin looked at her and said,

“Shoot that...”

But when he saw the conflict on her face,

“...Fine.”

He stopped. Sungjin turned and watched Ed run away on the Tiger, dazed. The Tiger was very fast. It wasn't possible to catch up to the tiger without Cain Rajenta or Shadowrun available. And this Barrastan Plain was a very large area. Even with the map limitation, it was likely that he would not be able to locate Ed before the time got over.

“Damn it!”

Sungjin kicked the ground in anger. The Hunters began to edge away from Sungjin when they saw this. Even Juggernaut who had put up resistance until the end slowly moved away in fear of being attacked in retaliation. Only Serin remained behind and walked up to him.

“Oppa, maybe there was some sort of misunderstanding...”

Sungjin cut her off.

“The one misunderstanding is you. That guy, he's the one responsible for completely screwing up the previous raid.”

“But there could have been...”

“No matter his reasons, It's safer to cut the problem at the roots before, is it not?”

“But...”

“But what? What are you going to do if he fires a spell at you from the back during the middle of the fight?”

Serin couldn't say anything more to Sungjin's words. Sungjin was about to say more to Serin when the Operator spoke from the Cube.

[The Chosen One Requested your teleportation.]

And soon, Baltren's image appeared from the cube. He urgently called out.

“Kei, please come and help. Right now...”

But he couldn't continue to speak because he was too busy blocking someone's spear.

Sungjin saw Serin who was silently looking down at the ground and said,

“Let's have a conversation when we get back to Ninety Nine Nights.”

And then he said, “Accept.”

Sungjin moved to the other dimension. Baltren's Dimension was in a mess. It appeared as though someone must have screwed up the initial Guerrilla warfare phase because the main Demon Army was present at the scout camps. The Hunters were putting up resistance with Baltren as the anchor, but the odds were overwhelming to begin with.

Few hunters were already lost, laying on the ground. Quickly grasping the situation, Sungjin hastily ran in to help the others.

“Uaahp!”

He cut down all the Demons that approached him.

“Kaa!”

Even as he watched the Demon cry out in pain, Sungjin was recalling Edward's face from earlier.

‘It was...such a good opportunity...’

And each time he had that thought, anger would fill his mind. One by one, the Hunters who were surrounded by the enemies were saved by Sungjin's efforts, and the tables were turned. But in the middle of it all,

[The Chosen One Requested your teleportation.]

Nada had called him this time.

“Hey Sungjin, we are planning on fighting the main force soon... we lost a hunter during the Guerrilla phase. Would you please come and help us out?”

The situation on that side was much better. Sungjin said to her,
“Here, let me finish with the boss on this side first. Wait for me.”
“Alright okay.”

Sungjin moved dimensions where Nada was waiting after he had finished helping Baltren defeat the leader Zeratar. When Nada saw Sungjin who was bathed in blood, she asked,

“...Will you be okay, Kei?”

She knew it was likely that none of that blood was his, but she thought that perhaps he might be physically exhausted. But Sungjin nodded and said,

“I am okay. I’m okay so, let’s get going.”

Nada thought that he was acting slightly strange, but she still turned to the other hunters to tell them,

“Then let us begin.”

One of the Hunter faced the main army and chanted,

“Fireball!”

And let loose a spell.

‘Boom!’

Flames erupted with a loud bang. The enemies came charging in; it was a staggering number of foes. The other hunters had looked upon the army with fear, but Sungjin actually welcomed their sight.

Ever since he lost track of Edward, he felt like if he didn’t swing his sword, he would become angry. So once Sungjin ended his third raid, he spent the remaining time to search for trolls.

The raid this time did not yield all that much. He had spent a long time assisting the ‘Chosen Ones’ and searching for trolls in other dimensions proved to be difficult (for the same reason as Edward).

Either way, Sungjin used up all his time, and he was summoned by the Operator to the Hunter’s Hall.

*

‘Woong’

Sungjin arrived at the room with endless rows of columns along with the sound. The Hunter’s Hall which had been filled as far as the eye could see was now looking empty with only a few hunters standing interspersed.

Sungjin turned his head to look around, hoping to get a glimpse of Edward. Of course, it wasn’t like harming someone else was possible in this room. There was no way the Operator would allow that.

[Congratulations. The Hunters in this room have successfully cleared fourteen chapters.]

[Of the 7,310,067,613 Hunters who had participated in the first Raid]

[There are currently 6710 Hunters still remaining.]

Sungjin thought about it carefully.

‘...6710?’

There were more left alive than he had thought.

‘How many was it last time? I think there was a lot less alive by this point.’

He was right. From this point onwards, he began to run into Hunters he met before more and more often due to the decreasing number of Hunters still alive. But 6710 was far more than last time.

He didn't remember the exact figure, but it didn't seem likely that Sungjin would run into his old teammates anytime soon with such a large crowd of people.

[Everyone is among the top 10,000 people]

[And have proven your own strengths.]

[Please survive until the end and prove the strength of Humanity.]

[And become the savior of the specie.]

After the Operator's words, Sungjin was teleported back to the Black Market. Sungjin sat down at the teashop as if collapsing onto it.

"What should I get for you, Sir Hunter?"

Sungjin replied to the owner,

"Anything cold."

"Understood."

Sungjin mulled over the events of the raid. Lots of things had happened, but Edward was the first thing on his mind. Sungjin gripped his fist and slammed on the innocent table. He had hunted the Hidden boss solo and earned many items. The Raid itself was a success, but not being able to kill Edward was most disappointing.

"I have brought your order."

She soon brought a cup of Iced Tea half filled with Ice. Sungjin didn't worry about the Cold and drank it all in one go.

Chapter 165 – Black Market Fourteenth Shopping

Sungjin checked the loot he obtained from the raid at the ‘First Drop’ as he always did. The items he decided to keep were four in total. The Blue gem obtained as the Hidden Piece, the blindfold given to him by Archae’ard, the staff, and the Cube.

Sungjin was filled with expectation when the Blue Gem was identified as a crafting material. He was planning on bringing it to Kargos. If the blacksmith was able to make an item of the same class as ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ then it would dramatically increase his own power.

Sungjin then picked up the blindfold that he had mistaken first as a Sunglass and second as a VR Headset. It had a very peculiar appearance.

‘I’ll...test this out tonight.’

He put the blindfold in the Cube after making a decision. The next was the Staff. In truth, there was no use for the staff. Even though he had a large repertoire of spells, it couldn’t be compared to his four swords, Moon Specter, Blood Vengeance, Artemio, and Ariane.

But even so, Sungjin decided to hold onto the staff without sending it off to the Auction house as even the Dragon Archae’ard had most definitely said,

‘And... Perhaps... You will also need this.’

The last item was a cube that looked just like the Operator’s Cube. It was much smaller in size and looked like it wouldn’t fit very many items. But the dragon had said many strange things-

‘Is keeping tradition.’

‘Human. Since I lost, I’m giving you a reward.’

‘That Cube is something you’re using, but it’s not yours. Right? However, that cube that you’re holding, that one is yours.’

– while handing it over. Sungjin took a small sip of the Iced tea as he inspected the cube. The cup was mostly melted ice water because he had drained much of it earlier, but Sungjin gave it no mind.

He was too busy observing the Cube. It looked like putting sword or shield into it would be impossible based on the size. It would hold a necklace or ring at most. Sungjin was holding it when he absentmindedly said,

“Hey Operator...”

The Operator’s Cube approached Sungjin when addressed.

“Oh...right.”

Now that he thought of it, the cube was not under the control of the Operator. The Operator then asked Sungjin, unsure of what to do.

[Please name the desired service.]

“No...it’s nothing.”

The Operator’s Cube returned to its original position with Sungjin’s words. Sungjin looked back to the small Cube

‘I can’t help but think this thing needs to be operated manually...’

It was an equilateral cuboid. Thinking that the only side decorated with a blue drawing of a dragon was suspicious, Sungjin took a closer look when he accidentally pressed the side and then

‘Click’

With a sound, the side of the Cube lifted up and opened. Sungjin was startled for a moment, but he calmly inspected the interior. The inside of the Cube was very dark, like the Operator’s Cube.

‘Ooh... so the inside is limitless too, right?’

Sungjin took a look at his hands. Many of his fingers were decorated with rings. And among them, he selected the oldest ring of them all, the Lich’s Finger.

“Unequip”

Soon the ring wrapped around his finger unraveled and crawled away like a caterpillar and reassumed a ring shape upon the table. Sungjin picked up the ring and dropped it inside.

‘Clatter’

But he heard the ring hit the bottom.

“What?”

Sungjin checked the inside. The Lich’s Finger was laying just inside.

‘...wait...’

Sungjin carefully put his finger into the box. He first extracted the Lich’s Finger again and placed it on top of the table and then tried to touch the walls of the Cube with his hand. As expected, his finger reached the bottom of the Cube; the inside of the seemingly bottomless Cube was simply painted black.

‘What is this? It’s not unlimited!’

Although Sungjin had thought it was like the Operator’s Cube, it was actually not all that similar. As it was right now, it was no better than a small locker. Sungjin cursed the dragon in his mind.

‘Wow...he spent all that time trying to act like he did something amazing...and this is what he gives as a reward?’

Sungjin stared at the little cube for a bit more before he threw it into the Operator’s Cube.

He was telling himself ‘there will be a time where it will be useful,’ but he couldn’t quite figure out what it was used for just

yet.

‘Well, at least it doesn’t hurt for me to hold onto it.’

Sungjin concluded his thoughts on the matter and began to inspect the rest of the items. The ones remaining were items he had obtained from troll hunting. All of it was slated to be auctioned off. Sungjin took a napkin and pen and began to jot down their prices.

Appraisal of the items was finished much earlier than usual. There was only one round of troll hunt this time around, so he ended up getting fewer items than last time. And truth be told, the trolls were probably going to continue to diminish in number as the raids progressed from this point forward.

According to the Operator, the number of Hunters remaining were 6710. If it’s divided into teams of fives, then it meant there were now 1342 parties remaining. Now there weren’t many trolls or opportunity to troll left. Sungjin took out the Troll Seeker Marbles he had which still had charges remaining on them.

‘I guess...this part is starting to come to an end.’

Soon he wouldn’t need to go charge five marbles at a time at Darker Than Black. Sungjin twirled the pen in the air as he recounted the total again.

‘6710 hunters...1342 parties...’

In truth, this raid at the Great Plains of Barrastan was actually a high difficulty raid where even the slightest mistake could quickly lead to a wipeout. Especially considering the fact that the final battle against the main army was essentially a small scale war, it was very difficult for any party to come out intact.

Before regression, he had just barely survived after he sacrificed a few of his teammates, and even most of the ‘Chosen Ones’ lost a few comrades during the raid despite the 20 percent bonus from Sungjin’s stats. But considering the difficulty, the number of

people that survived this raid was actually fairly high.

‘I am sure now... the number of surviving hunters is higher than before...why is that so?’

Sungjin thought of it carefully. He couldn’t really think of anything that stood out to be different from before, so why was the result so different?

‘If anything can be said to have changed, it would be that this is my second time around...’

Now that he thought of it, Sungjin felt he had contributed to the change. First, he directly saved many hunters. Serin was a prime example. If it weren’t for him, she would have died at the Canyon.

Not only her, but Sungjin also tried to keep everyone he met alive as much as possible. He did cause trouble in the beginning by taking a large percentage of contribution points, but he did restrain more and more as the raids progressed.

So there would have been a great number of people that didn’t die thanks to him.

Second, he actively killed a large number of trolls. Trolls may power up themselves but inevitably lead to an overall decrease in the number of people. But because he had hunted so many of them, the would-be-victims were indirectly saved by his actions.

And finally, he himself hand-picked ‘Chosen Ones’ and created a format where they safeguard the hunters and carry them to the end of the raid. A fair number of people had been saved by their efforts.

‘But...it can’t be all that many.’

Sungjin couldn’t really figure out the cause, but he didn’t dwell long on it. It wasn’t like he could recall an exact number from the last time so it would be difficult to make a comparison with any certainty. Sungjin stood up and headed towards the Pig Brothers’ Auction house.

“Welcome, Mr. Hunter.”

Sungjin placed the items he received this round into the auction and then asked about the items still not sold from the previous days.

“So any items with bids?”

“None, Mr. Hunter.”

“Not one?”

“There is not one, sir.”

The number of items that won't be bought or bought at their minimum listed price was increasing. This is also due to the decrease in total population. There were now very few buyers remaining.

“Then please take this, this, and this off of the auction.”

“I will send it directly to your Cube.”

Sungjin recollected the items that remained unsold for few rounds and placed them into his cube. Next, he visited the pawn shop.

“Welcome, Mr. Hunter.”

Sungjin sold the non-auctionable items for few coins. It was a far lower price than he could have potentially demanded from an auction, but it was better to have something rather than continue to hold the item in a deserted Auction house. Sungjin headed to Kargos's smithy once he was done with his business. Kargos was sitting on top of the anvil smoking a cigarette when he noticed Sungjin approaching and waved his hands.

“Yo~ owner of four swords, how are things?”

Sungjin nodded in response. Kargos held the cigarette between his teeth as he rubbed his hands and asked,

“So, what do you have for me this time?”

Sungjin took out the Hidden Piece of this round, the blue Gem that wouldn't look amiss floating amongst the clouds.

“Do you recognize this?”

But Kargos's jaws dropped, and the cigarette fell to the ground. He stared at the gem agape.

“Just...where did you find it?”

Sungjin thought about it for a moment. He had seen a similar reaction to when he produced the Dragon's heart. But like always Sungjin's answer was the same.

“Of course the raid.”

Kargos accepted the gem with trembling hands. Sungjin said to him,

“I think the name of this gem was...what was it, Elendil's Final Preparations?”

“It has many names. Blue Sky, Final Preparations, Worth of Universe, Beginning of the End...” said Kargos who for the first time was acting like he was holding a truly precious gem in his hands. Sungjin then replied,

“Anyway...are you able to make this into something? Something that I can use.”

Sungjin was expecting the usual ‘of course’ as a reply because Kargos had been able to complete every request successfully. But Kargos gave an unexpected response instead,

“...Maybe...”

And he had such a small unconfident voice as he said it. Sungjin then said with a disappointed voice.

“Maybeeee?”

Kargos replied as if he was making an excuse.

“It's because of the nature of this thing. Whether you burn or

freeze it, you can't predict how it will turn out."

Sungjin was now sure that Kargos had never touched this item before. So he asked,

"So...does that mean you can't use it?"

Kargos looked away from the gem for the first time and turned towards Sungjin.

"No, I mean...I do want to give it a go at least..."

His gaze seemed to indicate 'I may fail, but please give me a go at this.' Sungjin gazed at him with his arms crossed for a moment. Truth be told, the answer was predetermined from the start.

There was no one else at the Black Market he could ask for help with. If he were to go to Meridian's store he could sell it, but it couldn't possibly be as worthwhile as crafting it into an item to take with him.

"Then...Good luck."

At his words, Kargos looked astonished.

"Really?"

"Yes. You've always done well until now. I'll just have to trust your skill."

"Ok then, I will put my heart and soul into this...I will give it my best. In return, I won't charge you anything for it."

"Ok...well, it's not like money is an issue..."

Kargos muttered to himself while holding the gem as if he couldn't hear Sungjin anymore.

"I will have to call my cousins."

"Cousins?"

"Yes, my cousins. They're all blacksmiths like me. I feel that...I will need their help to make an attempt."

“...so how long do you think it will take?”

“Probably... three days.”

“Three days?!”

“That’s the minimum. Three days.”

He had said it would take one day to make something out of Dragon’s heart, but this would take much longer.

‘Since this is a 10 man raid...one day is for resting...I will probably be able to see the result after the end of the next raid.’

One way or another, he had no other choice.

“Then I’ll leave it to you.”

“Got it.”

Sungjin bid his farewell and left the smithy. On the way back, he turned to see, and Kargos was still staring at the Gem while holding it as if it was a divine artifact.

‘Well...He’s a craftsman through and through so he will do the best that he can.’

Sungjin returned to bed at Ninety Nine Nights and collapsed onto the bed. It was a long raid, and he felt exhausted. Sungjin wanted to take a nap until dinner time. But once he closed his eyes, he recalled the face of Edward he had failed to kill earlier today. Even his voice from the distant past.

‘Sungjin.’

He couldn’t fall asleep now that he remembered. So Sungjin lay there on the bed until Dinner time. Without falling asleep.

Chapter 166 – Black Market Fourteenth Shopping (2)

“Here is the Chicago pizza that you ordered. Where shall I place it?”

Baltren raised his hand in response to Dalupin’s query.

“Here.”

A whole Chicago style pizza covered deep with yellow cheese and pepperoni slices was placed before Baltren. Upon seeing this, Franz swallowed his saliva as he said,

“Ooh, that looks delicious. Baltren, can I have a slice as well?”

“Of course. Here.”

Baltren picked up a slice of pizza. The cheese on the pizza stretched an incredible amount. Franz deliberately spoke in a loud voice as he saw this,

“Uwah.... That looks great!”

As he did so, he took a quick glance around. Ninety Nine Nights. It was the dinner time for Master Hunter Kei and Kei’s ‘Chosen Ones’. As always, a sumptuous feast was laid out on top of the table, but the atmosphere was different from usual.

The mood seemed to be more solemn than before. Even as they ate, the others did not say much. The only one who was excitedly talking was Franz. The reason for this atmosphere was because of Serin and Kei.

It seemed that something had happened during the raid as the two people did not say a single word. Furthermore, even if Franz did not know what happened, there was a chilly atmosphere that surrounded the two. Franz was the only person speaking at the table; Baltren and Nada did not speak up as they were mindful of Serin and Kei, and Mahadas was reserved from the beginning.

‘Did something happen?’

Franz stole glances at the two, but he was unable to obtain a single clue about what happened between them. Nevertheless, he tried to bring up feel-good topics to liven the atmosphere.

“Though this raid was incredibly difficult, it’s a relief that everyone finished safely. Since it seems that there’s not much left until the end, hang in there everyone. When the raids are over, we’ll be the world’s heroes after all.”

Baltren reacted to his words.

“Hero?”

“Of course. The Operator said it when the raid was over that there are... six thousand people remaining? That means that, excluding these six thousand, everyone else is trapped inside the purgatory. If some people are able to free them, then wouldn’t they definitely be treated as heroes?”

“Hrm...”

Baltren nodded his head as he chewed his pizza.

“Not just any heroes, either. We’ll definitely become heroes on a global scale. Global popularity is natural... and we’ll probably earn an incredible amount of money?”

“Money?”

This time, Nada showed some interest.

“Of course. Companies all over the world will be anxious for us to be in their commercials. Don’t you think so? For example, sports companies like Dike or Idaas... No, we’ll become VVVIP commercial models for all businesses.”

Nada placed her elbow on the table and supported her jaw with her hand as she said,

“Hrm... That sounds likely?”

“When the raids are finished, everyone will probably become incredibly busy since you’ll likely be invited to places all over the world. And you might also have to prepare an autobiography of your experiences since they’ll probably sell like hotcakes.”

Even Mahadas, who had silently listened up until then, said something.

“If it’s writing a book, then I’m a bit interested. Since in Buddhism, it is said that spreading Buddhist doctrines is one of the methods that accumulate the most virtue. I believe that a fairly decent book could be written if I combine the experiences I’ve obtained here with the teachings of Buddhism.”

As the conversation continued, the stiff atmosphere became slightly relaxed. Wealth and fame. These two topics are topics that everyone enjoys.

“If this happens, what do you guys want to do? I want to travel around the world. I want to see all of the attractions while eating great food, seeing great places and staying at great locations. Since we’ll be welcomed wherever we go... We’ll probably be received very warmly. Whether it’s hotels or restaurants... They might even want us to come.”

Baltren had more humble dreams in comparison.

“Travel? I don’t enjoy going to places. If I become that rich... I want to buy a building in Manhattan. A place where I can clearly see Central Park. There, I’ll drink some whiskey as I look down from the top floor. Though in the past I could only look from over the police car...”

Baltren grinned as if he was happy simply imagining it. Nada, as expected, seemed to have interest in real estate.

“I want to buy an old castle in France. After buying one, I could be like a queen every vacation... No, if it turns out like that then there wouldn’t be any need to work, right? Ah, right. When I quit,

I want to slap my superior on my way out. And then chuck my exit compensation envelope in his face. I always wanted to do it.”

She slapped the air twice with empty as she spoke. Mahadas did not have any desire for physical possessions, but there was something he did want to do.

“There were plans for some fellow Buddhists in Canada to build a temple in Toronto, but it was delayed for a few years due to the lack of funds. If I were to obtain money, I would like to donate to the cause.”

“The country will probably do it for you even if you don’t give them money. That is, if Rev. Mahadas wanted it.”

“Would they?”

“Of course. You’re a hero that saved the Earth. Do you think they wouldn’t do at least that much?”

“Hrm...”

As they continued to converse, the atmosphere at the table began to grow lighter. However, despite this Serin and Kei remained silent. Even after the meal was finished and it was time for dessert, they still continued to hold their silence. It was obvious that something had happened to the two, or perhaps between the two.

“Then I’ll take your orders for dessert.”

When Dalupin brought a pen and paper, Serin rose up from her spot.

“I’m sorry but... The briefing will be tomorrow, right? I’ll get up first. Since today was too tiring...”

Now that they looked, she had only eaten half of the [gooksoo](#) that she had ordered for dinner. The hunters were slightly taken aback, but no one stopped Serin who left saying that she was tired. As she had said, the raid was two days later, and today was a free day.

“Then, farewell. Have a good night.”

After bidding farewell, Serin turned her head to the Operator Cube and said,

“Operator, send me back to my dimension.”

With those words, she disappeared from the table at Ninety Nine Nights. At the same time, Franz glanced at Kei who was wordlessly staring at the table that she had disappeared from. Franz thought,

‘Something definitely happened between the two.’

*

“Everyone, you did well. Since the resting period is until tomorrow, get a good rest today.”

Sungjin said as he rose from his seat. The hunters returned to their respective dimensions one by one.

Left alone, Sungjin returned to his room and opened the door. The figure of Serin who did not say anything throughout dinner was stuck in his mind.

‘Can you stay for a bit?’

He wanted to keep her here and talk to her, but she claimed she was tired and left. Sungjin’s feelings were complicated. Of course, it was not as if he did not understand her feelings.

This was because Edward was someone who truly seemed to be a good person. However, instead, he was more dangerous because of this reason. Last time, the final ten were people who did not mesh well together, but everyone like and trusted Edward. However, at the final moment, he stabbed them in the back. His betrayal was so much more effective because of it.

‘Do I have to explain what had happened back then...’

Although it wasn’t something he wished to recall, he had no choice. This was the only method that he could use to persuade her. However, for some reason he felt sad.

Even if she did not understand immediately, he had hoped that

she would help him. Sungjin sat on top of his bed inside his room. After having eaten dinner, there wasn't anything to do in particular. He was not going to go shopping in the Black Market, nor was there a raid tomorrow. However, suddenly, Sungjin thought of what the Dragon Archae'ard's had said.

‘Ah, right. Before when I read your memories, there was something that I was also curious about.’

Having thought about that time, Sungjin called out the Operator.

“Operator.”

[Please speak.]

“That... Eye mask that I obtained this raid. Was it Ever Dream? Take it out for me.”

At Sungjin's request, the eye mask appeared from the cube. Sungjin held it up and examined it. The Dragon that had taken a peek at his past had said something strange as he handed the eye mask to Sungjin.

‘Why did Edward, at that time, shoot spells at his allies?’

The Dragon had also said,

‘There is a topic that I was thinking about recently... If you can know the past in its entirety, then could you not also predict the future in its entirety? Something like that. With that in mind... I'll give you this.’

Sungjin held the item above his head as he once again pulled up the Operator's explanation window. He then read the ability of the Active Skill ‘View of Fantasy’ again.

‘Shows what you want to see from inside the gaps between time that has flown past. Only activates when sleeping for longer than 7 hours.’

Sungjin asked the Operator,

“Operator, what time is it?”

[The time is 07:45:33 PM.]

Regardless of things, he had to go to Darker than Black at four thirty in the morning.

‘Since I have to get up at 4 AM in that case...’

In order to sleep for longer than 7 hours, he had to fall asleep by 9 PM at the latest. Since he could not fall asleep the moment he laid down, he had to attempt to fall asleep by 8:30. Sungjin said to the Operator,

“Operator. Set an alarm for 8... 8:20.”

[Understood.]

*

[It's 8:20, Mister Hunter]

Sungjin glanced at the Operator Cube. He had a set an alarm in case he forgot, but instead he constantly thought about it and had become filled with tension. Sungjin held up the eye mask and laid down on the bed. Afterwards, he turned off the lamp next to the headboard.

The rooms of the inn ‘Ninety Nine Nights’ were optimal for sleep, even for people who were sensitive to light. After turning off the last lamp, only an inky darkness was left, though it did not compare to the darkness of Darker than Black. Sungjin put the eye mask on his face as he thought,

‘Even though it's this dark, to wear an eye mask...’

Afterwards, he laid down on the bed. Though it appeared to be rather large, it weighed almost nothing. There was no sense of discomfort when lying down while wearing it like this.

‘Hrm... If I fall asleep like this... Is that it?’

He could not get a feel for how he was supposed to activate it. However, it was definitely identified as a ‘Passive Skill’, so there was likely nothing that he had to deliberately do. Still, since it said

that it would ‘Show what you want to see from inside the gaps between time that has flown past,’ he should at least think about what he ‘wanted to see’.

Without much further thought, Sungjin thought about that incident. That time, when Edward had shot magic at his teammates.

‘However, even if it’s like this... The reason why he shot magic at us... Isn’t that impossible to find out?’

Sungjin had his doubts, but still decided to listen to the Dragon’s words. He attempted to fall asleep while thinking about that time. However, since he was forcefully attempting to fall asleep, sleep did not come easily.

A person ate and slept based on the cycle of his body. Regardless of what he desired, for several weeks, Sungjin had been living a life where he went to sleep at about 10 and woke up at 4. All of a sudden, he began to worry.

‘This... What do I do if I can’t fall asleep?’

Failing here would waste the whole day. Since he couldn’t just take a nap for seven hours. Sungjin asked the Operator while lying down with his eyes closed.

“Operator, what time is it?”

[The time is 8:31:21]

There was still a lot of time remaining. Sungjin attempted to fall asleep a bit more. However, sleep did not come.

“Operator, what time is it?”

[The time is 8:45:02]

There were 15 minutes left.

‘If it’s like this...’

Still, it was an item that he had obtained after going through

many difficulties for it, so it was not as if he could simply not try it out. Sungjin decided to turn off the 4 am alarm so he could try sleeping for 5 more minutes.

He attempted to go to sleep one more time while thinking of that incident. However, for some reason sleep again did not come easily. Feeling helpless, Sungjin was about to get up and call the Operator, when at that moment, he could suddenly hear someone else's voice.

“Hey Sungjin, come here for a bit.”

When Sungjin lifted his head and looked, Illich was gesturing towards him. The Illich that he had personally killed not long ago.

‘What’s happening?’

Even though Sungjin was thinking so, his body began to walk towards Illich. He soon realized that he had arrived inside a dream.

Maemil gooksoo (the actual full name) – Buckwheat noodle soup.

Chapter 167 – Sungjin’s Dream

Sungjin took out Blood Vengeance and held it aloft.

‘Shruum’

As always, Blood Vengeance let out a sharp sound as it came out of its sheath. Sungjin anxiously moved his feet. However, at that moment an unidentifiable sound could be heard coming from the dark.

“Kieeeeeeeeh!”

Someone shouted from behind,

“Incoming!”

Soon, unrecognizable outlandish creatures appeared from the doors; Black bodies with many appendages, like an octopus that had covered themselves in ink.

However, there were saw-like teeth attached to every appendage. Furthermore, these octopi swung their legs as if they were crazed. Sungjin moved around busily in order to avoid them.

He leapt backwards, rolled sideways, and jumped into the air. However, he could not evade everything because his attention was focused on dodging the appendage that came flying at him from the front, but he was unable to see the leg that was approaching him from behind.

‘Shlick’

Sungjin desperately swung Blood Vengeance when he felt a strange feeling curling around his leg. Though he did manage to succeed in cutting off the octopus tentacle that was crawling up his leg, he was unable to block the tentacle that was swung in front of him because of this.

‘Thud!’

An enormous tentacle struck Sungjin in the abdomen.

“Kuuuk!”

Sungjin let out a shout as he rolled backwards. There was a zigzagging wound on his abdomen which was caused when the teeth on the tentacle tore his flesh. Blood came oozing out of the wound. Meanwhile, as the dreaming Sungjin saw the past him, he thought,

‘... How unsightly.’

Though there were several identical tentacles that were flying towards the collapsed, bleeding past-him, the dreaming Sungjin watched without any particular worry. This was because he knew that he would not die here. He will perish during the battle against the Demon King. Regardless of whatever attacks he received from this monster, he would not die here.

‘I think someone helped out here...’

Sungjin turned his head. Ryushin appeared and wielded his spear like lightning to protect him when the past-him collapsed.

“Haaap!”

Meanwhile, Mustafa appeared and began to use healing magic on his past self.

“Close the wounds and erase the pain, Heal!”

The dreaming Sungjin nodded his head when he saw this.

‘Ahh... That’s right; this was how it went...’

The Sungjin who was stuck inside the dream was able to watch over his past self from the third person perspective as if he had become a ghost. His past self quickly rose up and charged back into the fight upon receiving Mustafa’s healing magic. The figure of himself wielding a sword with one hand was incredibly strange.

‘Back then... I had only used one sword...’

Sungjun turned his vision from the hunters that were waging war and examined the surroundings. Inside the Demon King's castle, there were grotesque stone statues, columns wrapped with bizarre vines, and stained glass showing gruesome visions such as torture or execution.

‘... Was it like this?’

Previously, he was too focused on the raid that he did not pay attention to anything else. Since he was caught in between matters of life and death, hadn't looked around at his surroundings. Sungjin ignored the events of the past he already knew about and instead spent his time looking around at these details.

As he did so, the hunters were beginning to win. It was only the natural progression of events; even if the people who were involved did not realize it at the time. Sungjin returned to the place where his past self was. His past self was dodging the octopus monster's appendages when he gave a slightly embarrassing shout and cut off a tentacle.

“Huyap!”

Sungjin felt a bit ashamed.

‘What... Am I still like that?’

Regardless, the past self that was significantly slower than the current him joined forces with his allies and was barely able to stab his sword into the monster's main body. Once the main body died, the limbs that were squirming until now began to shrink like dry ice on top of a grill and disappeared into the air. Once the fight was over, Illich looked around the area and said,

“Now the remaining time is... If we can move, we should leave as quickly as possible.”

Upon hearing those words, Hildebrandt turned his head and asked,

“Hey, is anyone hurt? Raise your hands.”

“Nope.”

“No.”

However, at that time,

“Wait.”

Mustafa, who was at the very back, raised his hand.

“What, Mustafa were you wounded somewhere?”

“I’m not wounded. But I used all of my mana so give me some time to recover it. I need time to meditate.”

At that time, Edward also cautiously raised his hand.

“I would also like it if there was a bit of time.”

“...”

Illich glanced at Hildebrandt. Hildebrandt looked back at Illich, and the two nodded their heads. Illich pressed them as he said,

“Then quickly go meditate... We wasted too much time treating wounds in the previous resting period. If it continues like this, it looks like we’ll die to the Operator rather than to the Demon King.”

The dreaming Sungjin looked at the preaching figure of Illich.

‘... Leaving Hildebrandt aside... It’s a bit funny that I used to follow Illich’s commands. Well, though he did not really make any miscalculations...’

Sungjin felt a bit of a chill when he thought that one of the biggest trolls had led the final party.

“...”

Mustafa wordlessly dropped himself to the ground and began to use some active skill without further ado.

“Meditation.”

After Mustafa began, Edward, Nada, Hildebrandt, Shunsuke, and

Araujo, every hunter who used even a little bit of magic began to recover their mana. Sungjin examined what his past self was doing.

Since Sungjin was the only one who could not use magic at all amongst the ten hunters, he had nothing to do while they were recovering their mana. Now that he looked, he was talking idly with Umkhuba.

“You flew pretty far back then. Are you okay, Sungjin?”

“It hurt a bit, but since Mister Mustafa used magic on me... What about you Umkhuba. Did you not get hit at all? In spite of all of those legs?”

“Well, I dodged everything just by moving this way and that according to my instinct pwahaha!”

It was not a particularly informative conversation. Sungjin looked away from his past self. In truth, right now, observing Edward was more important than watching himself.

He had to see just what it was that Edward did, and when he began his preparations to troll. Sungjin focused his attention on Edward as he flew over (although it technically isn't flying) and approached him.

Edward was recovering mana with his eyes closed in a spot slightly apart from the other hunters. Sungjin watched him meditating. Edward looked so innocent with his eyes closed, that it made you wonder if there was any other person looking as pure as him.

‘But in truth that's not the case... Ah, right... I have to see if he has that.’

Sungjin turned his head and looked at Edward's fingers. There were rings on all ten of his fingers, but of those, it was the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’ with its blue glow that stuck out the most in Sungjin's eyes. This was because it was also on his currently

sleeping body.

‘As expected... This guy also met Ariane... and passed her test.’

In truth, Sungjin could not remember if Edward ever used the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’. This was because, at the time, he was completely ignorant when it came to magic so he simply thought, ‘they must’ve had an incredible Active Skill,’ whenever Edward or Mustafa used an impressive spell.

While Sungjin was examining Edward’s finger, a voice suddenly arose from Edward’s Operator Cube.

[Mana fully recovered to 100%.]

Afterwards, Edward opened his eyes. However, he then suddenly looked towards the dreaming Sungjin. Sungjin was incredibly alarmed.

‘Wh... What? Can he see me?’

While Sungjin was still surprised, Edward’s eyes turned back to their original position. Sungjin looked behind himself. At that moment, Mustafa was recovering mana while sitting cross-legged right behind him. It seemed that Edward was looking at Mustafa, and not Sungjin, after having completely recovered his mana.

‘... Right, he can’t see me... This body didn’t exist back then...’

While Sungjin was reassuring himself, Edward suddenly called out to his cube.

“Operator, can you take out El’tarim?”

At Edward’s words, a star-shaped item that gave off a blue light came out of the cube. Sungjin was incredibly surprised when he saw this. This was because there seemed to be the image of clouds floating around inside the bluish star.

This item was made from none other than the gem that made up the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’, the gem that the Dragon Archae’ard was searching for.

Since it was an item made from a rare gem that even Kargos barely had the chance to touch, it was not a normal item. It was an item that even he, who had perfectly cleared the raids from the beginning until now, had never seen before.

‘This... Just what...’

Sungjin took a closer look at the blue gem that had been cut into the shape of a star. However, at that time, Edward muttered as he held the star,

“Starlight.”

After which the star very briefly glowed before the light disappeared. Sungjin blinked his eyes as he examined Edward and his surroundings.

‘What was that? Just what happened?’

However, there was nothing that had changed. This included the other hunters and, of course, Edward. The other hunters did not know at all that there had been a light that shone in this corner. Of course, this included the past Sungjin who was chatting with Umkhuba.

Sungjin turned his head and looked again at Edward. He noticed that there was one thing that had changed from before. And this was none other than Edward’s expression. Edward, who had been gathering mana with a serene expression until just a moment ago, now had a subtly twisted expression with a slightly ill-feeling look in his eyes.

He threw the star inside the cube as if he were throwing away a toilet paper into a garbage can. Sungjin tilted his head.

‘What... After he used the Active Skill... He got irritated?’

However, all of a sudden, Sungjin remembered seeing that same expression on Edward. After intensely thinking about it, at the end, this expression was similar to the one that Edward wore right before the fight with the Demon King.

‘Yeah... That’s right... Then...’

Sungjin turned his head. Mustafa finished his meditation and stood up. Illich gestured with his hand when he saw this and said,

“Hey, if you’re ready, then let’s hurry up and go.”

The hunters got up from their places one by one. Including the past-him who had been chatting with Umkhuba. However, then Illich and Hildebrandt called the other hunters.

“Hey, Nada, Ryushin, and Sungjin. Come here.”

The past Sungjin approached Illich and Hildebrandt. The two began to explain the strategy to them.

“Since enemies will be approaching from all directions from here on... Ryushin, you go with Mustafa and protect him. Nada, you’re with Shunsuke.”

The people who were remaining was Sungjin and Edward.

“Sungjin, you’re with Edward.”

The dreaming Sungjin remembered everything after this.

‘It’s definitely after he said this... The Demon King shouldn’t be too far off from here?’

Having received his orders, his past self approached Edward.

“Hey Ed, they made me your guard.”

Edward replied with a slightly subdued voice,

“Really? I don’t need something like a guard, though.”

“As if... don’t be brash.”

At that time, his past self and Edward were rather friendly. The past Sungjin grinned and hit Edward on the shoulder. However, this time Edward held up his staff without saying much.

If it was according to his normal cheerful personality, then Edward would have said something in return. Having felt

something was strange, his past self asked Edward,

“What’s wrong Edward, are you nervous?”

“No... It’s... Just that now everything is almost over.”

In response, his past self grinned. Not knowing that he was going to die soon, the past Sungjin said,

“That’s right. It’d be great if these tedious raids were done with already.”

At that, Edward replied tersely,

“... Yeah.”

‘Creaaaaak’

At the very front, Hildebrant and Illich had gone forwards after opening the stone door. The Demon King was waiting just a short distance past this point. The dreaming Sungjin had been watching Edward’s every movement until then. From the moment that Edward had seen that blue light, his expression had become strange and would not change back.

Chapter 168 – Black Market Fourteenth Shopping (3)

“Uwhaaap!”

Blood Vengeance danced flashily every time Sungjin’s arm and wrist moved.

“Kweeeh!”

The enemies that Blood Vengeance cut turned into pieces while shrieking. The dreaming Sungjin crossed his arms over his chest as he watched, though in reality since he was insubstantial he only felt like crossing his arms. However, the fight did not continue on for long.

The Sungjin who was swinging his sword was probably aware of it, but the Sungjin who was watching it could feel it even more clearly. This was due to the fact that the speed of the Blood Vengeance that was cutting through the enemies, and the movement of Sungjin who was dodging the enemies attacks was gradually getting slower.

‘He’s exhausted... Goodness...’

On the other hand, there were countless monsters flowing out of the portal created by the Demon King. Sungjin looked towards the main force that was fighting against the Demon King. According to Illich, in order to stop the portal, it was necessary to wound the king’s body. However, the main force fighting against the Demon King was unable to attack due to desperately guarding against the Demon King’s attacks.

‘So this is why we couldn’t end it...’

The enemies continued to spill forth from the portal. Unable to hold on, the past-Sungjin looked backwards as he shouted,

“Edward! Support fire here!”

When he heard his own voice, Sungjin thought,

‘Now it’s time for the climax.’

Sungjin looked at Edward. However, Edward’s body did not face the portal but was turned in the complete opposite direction, towards where the tankers were fighting against the Demon King.

‘... This bastard...’

Soon, Edward breathed in deeply as he began to chant a spell.

“The Divine Spear...”

The past Sungjin, even then, thought that Edward was using the spell in order to help him. However, at this time, Edward had already made up his mind to troll.

“Of destruction, Spear of God!”

An incredibly dense spear of energy appeared in Edward’s hand as the spell finished. When Sungjin saw this, he thought,

‘When I think about it after having reached this point, this is where it started to get weird. The spell itself is... called the Spear of God...’

The Spear of God was the highest class attack magic of the White Magic category. It was not something prepared for the subordinates bothering Sungjin, but a spell that was prepared for the Demon King. To use this on those subordinates was no different from using a cow-butcher knife to kill chickens. Of course, not that he used it like that.

Edward did not look towards where Sungjin was and threw the energy spear towards the very front where Demon King was fighting against Illich. Illich, having received a sneak attack from his back let out a cry of agony as he fell forward.

“Agh!”

The Demon King who had been trading blows with him did not miss the opportunity and instantly severed Illich’s neck.

Hildebrandt, who had been receiving the Demon King's attacks along with Illich, stared at Illich's headless body with an alarmed expression.

From the beginning, it had been difficult to defend with the two of them working together. Now that Illich died, it was natural for all of the pressure to be focused onto him. Hildebrandt urgently activated his Active Skill,

“Four Castle Walls!”

However, during this moment, another of Edward's spells came flying in and stabbed him.

“Firefly”

A will'o'wisp like blue fire came flying and burned Hildebrandt's back.

“Ugh!”

Hildebrandt relaxed his defensive stance a tiny bit under the intense pain. Again, the Demon King did not miss the presented opportunity. He used the black substance that covered his body as a sharp sword and stabbed it into Hildebrandt's body.

Afterwards, the black substance soon turned into several blades and puffed out of Hildebrandt's body like an explosion. Because of this, Hildebrandt turned into a human-shaped sea urchin and collapsed on the spot.

“Erase the...”

Mustafa, who was standing behind Hildebrandt, had been about to chant a healing spell but instead closed his mouth. This was because he quickly realized that Hildebrandt had died immediately. He immediately attempted to chant a different spell, but the Demon King was already upon him.

Now that it was a situation where there was not a single tank left to protect him, it was natural that Mustafa's body was sliced

almost instantaneously. During all of this, Shunsuke drew back his bow unshaken as he said,

“Three Dragon’s Arrow”

Soon, three dragons appeared from his bow and went flying towards the Demon King. However, the Demon King moved his black substance and reflected back the first, the second, and the third dragon. The three arrows that Shunsuke fired went back and pierced Shunsuke’s left shoulder, his right thigh, and his heart.

Shunsuke collapsed while vomiting blood. It was now that the attackers who had been blocking the portals finally looked back. Nada and Araujo, Umkhuba and Ryushin, and Sungjin. The hunters who had been blocking the portal in three different sections, all of the attackers aside from Edward, were alarmed when they saw what happened.

But it was too late. The hunters that were closest to the pincer attack between the Demon King’s forces and Edward were the first to die. The Sungjin inside the dream had a stupefied expression as he watched Edward. At the same time, the dreaming Sungjin quietly muttered,

‘Just why?’

Soon, his past self also asked Edward,

“Just why?”

However, Edward did not say anything. The dreaming Sungjin ignored his past self and concentrated on Edward’s expression. The corners of his mouth had definitely been slightly raised. Soon, the black substance of the Demon King covered Edward and instantaneously turned him into powder. The enemies that came out from the portal violently stabbed at Sungjin who was the only one left.

‘Puk!’

It was unclear if he did or did not feel the pain, but he simply

stayed standing there. Having felt the critical situation of its owner, Blood Vengeance began to cry alone.

‘Kyeeeeeeen’

*

“Ahhh!”

Sungjin rose from his bed with a shout. Despite having experienced it and dreamed about it already, Sungjin could not help but shout at the scene of his own death.

“Haa... Haa...”

After regaining his breath, Sungjin took off the eye-mask that he was wearing and put it down next to his pillow. Soon, cool sweat rolled down from his forehead. Sungjin wiped it off with his hand, then turned on the lamp next to the headboard.

‘flick’

The room was brightened together with the sound of the lamp switch. He then looked out the window. It was still dark outside. Sungjin was about to ask the Operator Cube for the time, but the Operator began to speak first instead.

[Ringringringring. It is now 4 AM. Ringringringring]

It was the alarm to wake up to go to Darker than Black. Sungjin blankly stared at the cube for a moment.

‘Now that I think about it... It said that I had to sleep for 7 hours... For me to have had that dream... It should mean that the amount of time was just right.’

“Operator, that’s enough. I’m awake.”

Turning off the alarm, Sungjin got up from the bed. After taking a simple shower, Sungjin left Ninety Nine Nights and, as always, breathed in the morning air as he walked towards Darker than Black. While walking, however, he felt that walking was a bit strange. This probably was because until just a short while ago he

had moved around by floating in the air.

‘It was incredibly vivid... Rather than calling it a dream... It was more like a type of... Revisitation to the past...’

Though he had already experienced it all before, he had felt as if he was seeing everything for another time. This was especially so because he was able to freely go see the things that he had not been able to see back then.

There were three things that he had seen inside the dream that had left a strong impression on him. First, was the fact that Edward had possessed the ‘Ring of the Great Sage’. Second, was that Edward had a star-shaped accessory made from the rare gem which even a Dragon desired. Third, was that he truly had deliberately trolled on purpose.

However, with just that, it was a bit insufficient to answer Sungjin’s question – why did Edward troll?

‘I can’t figure it out just with seeing it for one day... The circumstance surrounding it is unknown as well... Do I have to sleep another night...’

Sungjin found himself already standing before Darker than Black while he had been thinking about various things. Sungjin thought,

‘Well... Since there’s still tomorrow... Let’s try it out tomorrow as well.’

He was just about to enter Darker than Black when Besgoro suddenly said,

‘Hrm?’

Sungjin briefly stopped and asked,

“What? Besgoro.”

‘Strange.’

What was strange was that Besgoro had spoken up at all. This was because Besgoro normally was fearful of Darker than Black

and its mysterious shop owner. This was why Besgoro never spoke up when they were near Darker than Black in spite of his chatty personality. However, this time, for the first time, he had opened his mouth.

“What’s strange?”

Besgoro answered,

‘The darkness... is shallow.’

“What is? Darker than Black?”

‘That’s right.’

Normally, Darker than Black was dark to the point that you could not see past your nose. The reason that Sungjin wore Besgoro, who hated coming here, was to use the helmet’s Ghost Vision. Sungjin took off Besgoro and looked at Darker than Black with his own eyes.

What Besgoro said was true. The entrance was still dark, but it was not the blackness of the past that lacked even a single mote of light. Instead, it was just a darkness that was similar to the darkness that covered the other shops. Sungjin muttered as he went inside Darker than Black.

“What’s this...”

‘Creeeeak’

As always, the old wooden stairs were noisy. Finally, having entered the shop, Sungjin found one more thing that had changed; the shop owner was now standing next to the chair.

In truth, if this were a normal shop then this would not have been a noticeable detail. But this shop owner had always sat in his chair with his hands gathered while waiting for him. Seeing the shop owner standing, Sungjin felt strange.

When he looked closely, it was even stranger. The shop owner was standing while looking at an empty space. Feeling slightly

terrified, Sungjin said,

“What... Why are you...”

The shop owner finally turned his head at Sungjin’s words and said,

“Ahhh... So, you came.”

It was as if he had been thinking about something else. The shop owner then gestured to the chair as he said,

“Please sit. It’s time for business, right? Business.”

When Sungjin sat down in the chair, the shop owner seated himself in the opposite chair. Sungjin held out just one marble towards the shop owner and said,

“Recharge.”

The shop owner wordlessly charged the marble and then returned it to Sungjin.

“That’s right. You met another Dragon.”

There was another person who read his memories here. Sungjin wordlessly handed over his cube as he said,

“Give me elixirs. I need them.”

“Hrm... Indeed.”

The shop owner took out elixirs from his vest and handed them to Sungjin which he began to drink right away. However, at that moment the shop owner spoke up.

“You’ve worked hard until now. My business ends here.”

“Mmph!”

Sungjin, who had been in the process of swallowing the elixirs, coughed in surprise.

“Wh... What?”

“I’m a being that exists to convey ‘will’. I’ve accomplished my

duty as of today, so I can no longer exist here.”

When Sungjin tilted his head, the shop owner continued,

“The elixir that you just drank, that’s the last of it. With that, you now have everything you need. You already had the determination, and now you obtained the power. It’s time for the story to end.”

“What do you mean...”

While Sungjin kept staring at the shop owner, the shop owner continued,

“I’m just saying that all requirements have been met.”

“Requirements?”

While Sungjin held up an eyebrow, the shop owner quickly spoke,

“There’s many things to say, but I can’t say everything. Even though I look like this, I’m still a busy person. This job... How should I put it... Is simply like a part-time job.”

It seemed that the shop owner did not have the intention of giving Sungjin an answer.

“Now it’s time for farewell. It was fun to know you for the short time we had, Sungjin.

At the end of those words, the shop owner’s body suddenly began to be covered by something dark. Sungjin stared at the shop owner in surprise, but at that time, the shop owner spoke up once more.

“Now that I think about it... There was something that I had received without payment. I must give something in exchange if I receive something...”

The shop owner suddenly extended his hand and pointed at the earring that Sungjin was wearing as he continued,

“When you have to choose one thing, choose that. The truth is

always precious.”

With those final words, the shop owner was assimilated into the darkness and disappeared from that spot as if he had dissipated into the surrounding darkness.

Chapter 169 – Black Market Fourteenth Shopping (4)

Sungjin looked around the area where the shop owner disappeared.

“What... What happened?”

Besgoro muttered,

‘He... vanished?’

Sungjin actually got up and began to examine the area where the shop owner had been sitting. There was no sign of his presence at all; the shop owner had disappeared without a trace. Sungjin crossed his arms as he stared at the empty spot where the shop owner had been.

“Just...”

However, as he was crossing his arms, something touched his elbow. It was the empty bottle of elixir from which he had just drunk. Sungjin picked up and inspected the empty bottle. The shop owner had bidden farewell as if it were permanent instead of a temporary separation.

Considering his characteristics of ‘not telling everything, but being true with what he does say’, the man was most definitely gone forever. As if blaming the already disappeared shop owner, Sungjin said,

“But then... where am I supposed to use my Black Coins now...”

For the past few chapters, he had used all of his Black Coins in purchasing elixirs, but now that the shop owner was gone he could no longer buy more elixirs. He now had nowhere else to spend his Black Coins.

“Shit... He does whatever he wants until the end.”

Sungjin kicked the chair that the shop owner had sat in. Besgoro whispered in his ear afterwards.

‘Well, there’s that at least.’

“What is?”

‘That you changed all of your white coins into Holy Water of Baptism.’

“Hrm...”

‘If you didn’t do that much, then you wouldn’t have been able to increase your number of allies.’

Sungjin briefly looked at the empty chair before he said,

“... That’s true.”

Afterwards, he left the place. On the way back to Ninety Nine Nights, Sungjin reflected on the words that the shop owner had said.

“I’m a being that exists to convey ‘will’. I’ve accomplished my duty as of today, so I can no longer exist here.”

“You already had the determination, and now you obtained the power. It’s time for the story to end.”

“I’m just saying that all requirements have been met.”

Most of what the shop owner had said had been difficult to understand. But of the things he had said, Sungjin did understand one thing; this was what the shop owner had said while pointing to Sungjin’s earring.

‘When you have to choose one thing, choose that. The truth is always precious.’

Sungjin held his hand to his ear.

‘But... why this?’

He touched the earring and said,

“Unequip”

Soon the purple light of the gem embedded in the earring caught his gaze. The sleepy looking half closed eyes inside of the gem was looking back at him. In some angles, it looked like it was somewhat drowsy, and in others, it looked like it was glaring sharply at him.

‘This... what was its name?’

Sungjin held the earring above his head. Soon, the Operator’s information window popped up and he read the name of the earring again.

“Trite... Eye of Jeremiah...”

Leaving that aside, Sungjin was incredibly curious about what the shop owner had meant by, ‘when you have to choose one thing’.

‘When will it be the time for that? He’s not someone who would say things lightly...’

For now, Sungjin re-equipped the earring by saying,

“Equip.”

Afterwards, he walked on the road to Ninety Nine Nights. But along the way, Sungjin suddenly had an idea and he turned and headed towards Kargos’s Smithy; he was curious about how the work from yesterday was progressing.

Kargos’s smithy was as bright as the middle of the day despite being so early in the morning. The glow of hot molten steel shone from the furnace, and there were fireworks ceaselessly rising from the anvil and hammer. What was unique was that there were several dwarves similar to Kargos that were gathered at the smithy.

‘Aahh, he did say he was going to call his relatives, didn’t he? One, two, three, four...’

Sungjin gave up counting them when the number exceeded

seven. This was because their appearance was so similar to the point that it was like attempting to solve a puzzle. They were still concentrating on their work even when Sungjin came close by.

It was as if Sungjin had become an invisible ghost. Sungjin watched them work with his arms crossed. After a while, Kargos saw Sungjin and raised his hand,

“Hullo, there! Commissioner.”

Sungjin almost didn’t recognize him. This was because Kargos’s face had been turned completely black and there were several places on his beard that had been burned away. Also, since he had been mixed amongst his relatives that looked like him, Sungjin had mistaken him for someone else.

“Ah... Hello, Kargos.”

Sungjin approached him and asked,

“How is it? Is it going well?”

The smith’s eyes glowed like a drunk man,

“Everything is going well since my cousins and I are putting our soul into crafting it. Now, take a look.”

He gestured Sungjin to look inside of the furnace. Sungjin tried to look as directed, but just the act of trying to take a peek inside caused Sungjin’s face to be blasted with immense scorching heat. But he forced himself to look inside anyway in spite of the heat.

There was something resembling a mesh filter placed below it, but something placed on top of it was giving off a radiant blue glow. Sungjin stared at it attentively for about three seconds when,

“... Hrm?”

he came to realize that the shining light was just like the form of a shining star. He endured the scorching flames threatening to melt his face and asked Kargos,

“Kargos, that gem.”

“Hrm?”

“Are you crafting it into the shape of a star?”

“No, no. That gem... I can’t explain it, but I can’t change its shape however I want.”

“Then?”

“It chooses its shape by itself.”

Sungjin asked in surprise,

“What?”

“I also couldn’t believe it the first time I read the ancient notes left behind by blacksmiths of old. However, now that I see, the legends were true. That gem, it’s as if... it originally was in that shape.”

It seemed that the gem was made of some sort of shape memory alloy, though it was likely that Kargos did not know what it was.

“... Is that so?”

Sungjin replied frivolously before saying,

“Then, I’ll leave it in your hands.”

“Ok. Just have faith in me.”

Sungjin bid farewell to Kargos then turned his feet around. On his way to Ninety Nine Nights, Besgoro said,

‘What a fascinating object, a gem that returns to a star shape all on its own. All my years on the battlefield, fighting and triumphing against countless barbarians chieftains of the north, heathen cult leaders of the south, and the witches of the west, I have taken a great number of treasures as my trophy... but I have never heard nor seen anything like that.’

At Besgoro’s words, Sungjin let out a short snort.

“Hm...”

His attention had returned to the dream he had just had.

‘The star-shaped item that Edward had used... Then, that...’

That gem was the Hidden Piece from the previous chapter, which Archae’ard was searching for. The moment you obtained it from the corpse, Archae’ard would appear from the sky and demand it. If you declined, you would fight.

‘That means...’

It meant that Edward had also passed Archae’ard’s test and entrusted it to Kargos after earning the gem.

‘... Just what did Edward go around doing... That gem... Then...’

The doubts gave birth to new doubts. But the gem would not be complete for another day. Sungjin briefly stopped and looked back towards Kargos’s smithy. The light of the fire from the smithy could be easily seen from afar. He intensely gazed at that light for a few seconds, then returned to Ninety Nine Nights.

*

Grrrrrrr

The sound of his stomach rumbling could be plainly heard. Sungjin finally opened his mouth.

“Operator, the time?”

[The time is 1:07 PM.]

‘... Is it already this late?’

After he had returned from his trip to Darker than Black and Kargos’s smithy, Sungjin had laid in bed. He did not eat breakfast, nor did he sleep. Instead, he thought about what the two Dragons, Ariane and Archae’ard, had said, about what the shop owner of Darker than Black had said, and about Edward’s past and his secrets.

All the pieces seem to be there but didn’t seem to fit somehow.

This was undoubtedly because there was still a piece of the puzzle that was missing.

‘For now... After the next raid is over... I should know more after the gem is completed.’

While Sungjin was still thinking about things, his stomach once again growled.

‘Grrrrrrrrrr’

Sungjin got up from his bed like a spring. It was a necessity that hunters eat properly. He heard the Operator’s voice when he opened the doors and began to climb down.

[The Chosen One has requested your teleportation.]

‘Now...?’

When Sungjin turned his head to look, Serin’s appearance was shown above the cube.

‘Ah, right... There’s Serin’s matter, too.’

Sungjin said to the cube,

“Aah... I’ll go. Teleport me.”

Sungjin was teleported to a restaurant on the outskirts of the Black Market. The eco-friendly landscape was well designed with all sorts of flowers and trees. It was the first time that Sungjin had seen such a place, even though he was the person who had spent the most amount of time in the Black Market.

Sungjin was thinking ‘wow there was a place like this’. It was a wonder that she found such a place. Serin was sitting at the best table in the center (as there were no other guests, reservations were not necessary). Sungjin sat down in front of her.

The problem was that, unlike the bright and beautiful environment, the mood was rather heavy. Even though they didn’t have a fight, or rather even though they didn’t even have a close enough relationship to be having a fight, the mood was rather

awkward. After a moment, a deer demihuman with immense horns approached as he said,

“Welcome, to Five Emotions. Are you ready to order?”

Serin raised her hand towards him.

“We’ll order after a bit.”

“I understand. Then, please call me whenever you are ready.”

The deer demihuman courteously bid farewell then disappeared into the back. Awkwardness resumed. The two hesitated for a moment.

“I thought about yesterday, but...”

“I thought about yesterday, b...”

The two spoke up simultaneously but then stopped and stared at each other. Sungjin used that timing to speak first, apologizing.

“Yesterday, I think I was a bit hasty... When you first meet Edward... How should I put it, he really does seem like a nice guy after all.”

Serin also replied, while including an apology.

“No, it’s okay, Oppa. Since Oppa had returned in time once, there should have been something you saw before... I think I wasn’t able to understand that. If Oppa wanted to do something like that... There must have been a reason for it.”

The awkward mood quickly dissipated once the conversation began like that. Furthermore, at that time Sungjin’s stomach once again let out a sound.

‘Grrrrrrrrrr’

The atmosphere was suddenly less serious. Sungjin patted his stomach as he said,

“Let’s first order our meals and then continue with our talk. I skipped breakfast so I’m really hungry.”

“Ah, of course. We’re ready to order.”

The deer demihuman with large horns approached and took their order. Once that was done, Sungjin stated the core of the matter.

“Well... What I see is different from what you see, but... It’s enough if we trust each other and act even if there are things we know and don’t know between us. It’s the same for me, and it’s the same for you.”

It was what he had thought of yesterday. Serin nodded her head as she said,

“Yes, Oppa.”

Afterwards, Sungjin briefly thought about Edward once more. That guy, who was always personable. It was not unreasonable for Serin to have misunderstood, either. At that time, Serin said,

“Oppa. But what you’re saying is...”

Her hesitation meant that there was something else she had wanted to say.

“Hrm, what?”

“No... It’s nothing.”

Unlike her normal actions, she shook her head meekly. During this time, the deer demihuman began to serve the food.

“Here is the salad with oysters and fresh dressing.”

Chapter 170 – Sungjin’s Dream (2)

“That’s why it won’t be particularly difficult so long as you’re wary of sneak attacks by the pterodactyls from the air.”

Everyone began to write something down on a note paper once Sungjin finished speaking.

“The name of the Boss... is a bit unique, but in any case, it was some kind of Tyrannosaurus. This guy has raptors... You know, right? What raptors are? They’re small and fast...”

Baltren spoke up.

“I know, they appeared in movies as well.”

Franz also raised his hand.

“Yes, I also know.”

It seemed that everyone had some idea of what raptors were.

“Okay, in any case, the boss has raptors following him around, but these raptors are rather fast.”

Sungjin then glanced at Serin for a moment before he continued saying,

“Because of this, the attackers in the backline have to be careful, since they can turn around in the blink of an eye and charge towards you with incredible speed.”

“Okay.”

Baltren also drew a circle on his note paper as he said,

“Okay, then I have to be careful as well, and pay attention to the attackers in the rear.”

“If you pay attention to that, then it shouldn’t be that difficult.”

Nada asked,

“And the Hidden Boss?”

“Ah. The Hidden Boss... If you look at the map, there'll be a volcano-like place. If you walk on the road leading upwards, there'll be a big egg.”

“An egg?”

“Yeah. It's an egg, but... hrm... Its height is about five meters? It shouldn't be particularly hard to find it.”

“Okaay.”

“When you find it, you just have to simply hit it a few times as if you were knocking on a door. If you do that, then the mother will appear from far away.”

“The mother?”

“Yeah. It's a pterodactyl, but it's almost larger than a dragon... Ah, right, you know the crimson dragon you saw in Chapter 10?”

“Yes.”

“It should be a little bigger than that. Probably.”

“Huh... If it's that big, then it should be rather difficult.”

“Yeah. Furthermore, it shoots immense sound waves from its mouth... So it'll be a bit hectic.”

Everyone made notes as Sungjin spoke.

“Hrm... Be careful of sound attacks...”

Sungjin looked at the hunters as he continued.

“Still, overall, it should be considerably easier when compared to the last chapter. This applies to the normal monsters as well as the boss monster. If you run into problems, call me.”

“Yes.”

“Okay.”

“I said it before, but... In this chapter, let's concentrate on gathering teammates. Everyone was too busy last chapter since the

difficulty was rather high, but there should be some leeway in this chapter. Please report to me if you find someone who can become our teammate.”

“Okay, understood.”

“Then, our briefing will end here. I’ll see you all tomorrow at breakfast.”

With that, the ‘Chosen Ones’ got up from their spots and left one by one. Sungjin immediately went up towards his bedroom after they had left. If there was something that he had to do by tomorrow, it was immediately going to sleep. Furthermore, there was no need to get up late at night anymore since the shop owner of Darker than Black had left. Sungjin grabbed the eye mask that was placed next to his head and then sat down on his bed.

‘This... Does it show me more if I sleep longer?’

He did not know if this was the case, but he did not think that it would show him less because he slept for a longer period of time. Sungjin put his eye mask on right away and laid down on the bed. According to the Operator’s explanation, the eye mask showed you ‘what you wanted to see’. Sungjin closed his eyes and thought,

‘What I want to see. However, what I saw that time... It didn’t really tell me anything. Then... Just what should I say I want to see...’

Sungjin made up his mind to watch what had happened before that incident; That is, to see the events of the past before Edward had betrayed them.

‘Yeah... If it’s that then there might be some more clues...’

Sungin tapped the eye mask he was wearing a few times as he said,

“Hey, show me the past of the old Edward. From before that time when he betrayed us... No... From when Edward began the raids until the end. Pick only the important parts, okay?”

Of course, the eye mask did not say anything. Even so, Sungjin felt that if he did this much, then the eye mask would show him what he had asked. And just like that, Sungjin went to sleep.

*

[A hunt will soon begin. Prepare for combat.]

Sungjin's body shivered when he heard that voice. It was the Operator's voice that notified them of the beginning of the raid. He had only heard it twice, but he believed that he would not be able to forget it. Edward looked around the area in a daze.

“What? Where is this?”

Sungjin crossed his arms as he watched Edward.

‘So the start is similar.’

Chapter 0 – Living Mannequin

Time Limit: 30 Seconds

A large hologram appeared as the raid began.

[For the first Chapter, just this once, you will be provided with a weapon. Select your weapon.]

Edward pondered for a moment, before choosing the club.

“Club... Give me the club.”

In a certain way, it was an unremarkable choice. After all, who has actually used a sword or a spear in the 21st century? After lifting the club, Edward dithered for a while before hitting the mannequin on the head thereby killing it. It was the start of the raids. On seeing this, Sungjin became slightly nervous.

‘This... Is it going to show me everything from the beginning...’

However, thankfully it immediately skipped to the next cutscene showing the corpse of the troll that was still burning and Edward who held his club while gasping for breath. It seemed that the eye

mask that the Dragon gave him picked out only the important parts to show him, as he had requested.

‘What a relief.’

While Sungjin was having this thought, Edward said,

“Operator, my stats? Can you show them to me?”

HP: 90

MP: 370

Strength: 10

Dexterity: 12

Endurance: 9

Magic Power: 33

Mind Power: 37

Unallocated Stat points: 10

This was Edward’s basic stats. While his endurance was average, his stats related to magic were abnormally high. Edward himself did not know the reason for it.

“Magic... Just what is Mind Power and why is it so high?”

The Operator gave an answer to Edward’s muttering.

[These stats are important when using magic. Magic Power affects the strength of spells, while Mind Power affects your total amount of mana.]

“Really? Then... Does that mean I have the talent for magic?”

The Operator did not respond. Instead, it was Sungjin who was watching the dream that responded.

‘That’s right... And a lot at that.’

Of course, Edward could not hear him. Edward asked the

Operator,

“Then, where can I learn spells?”

[This will be explained after you have been teleported to the Black Market.]

“Black Market?”

The scene changed immediately after Edward finished asking the question.

“You dare to challenge us brothers?!”

“Fight! Human!”

“I’ll kill you, human!”

Familiar voices could be heard. Soon, the figure of an ogre with two heads on one body, Pach and Cho’Roch could be seen.

‘Is this... chapter 4 Giant’s Canyon?’

Sungjin looked towards the hunters. However, there were only two of them present. There was Edward, who was dodging Pach’s club and a spearman who was stabbing his spear in-between Cho’Roch’s staff.

“Grooooooooooar”

Pach swung his club. Edward barely avoided it as he chanted a spell.

“Flash!”

Edward’s hand shone brightly for an instant.

“Aargh!”

Pach let out a scream as he walked backwards. On the other side, Cho’Roch who had been fighting the spearman tried to take a look backwards.

“What? What’s wrong?”

However, in that moment, a spear came flying in and stabbed

him in the neck.

“Hrk!”

While the two had become powerless, Edward once more chanted a spell.

“Fire that burns blood! Ignite!”

Soon, a fire ignited on his hand. Edward agilely ran forward and crammed the flame into Cho’Roch’s wound.

“Gaaaaaaaah!”

“Graaaaaaah!”

Pach and Cho’Roch cried out in pain like a stereo speaker before falling over. The unknown spearmen and Edward delivered the final blow.

[Boss Monster ‘Pach and Cho’Roch’ defeated!]

Edward let out a heavy sigh after the Operator’s announcement.

“Whew... We finally killed him. Since there was only two of us remaining, I thought it would be more difficult...”

However, at that moment,

‘Swish!’

The spearman swung his spear while aiming at Edward’s throat. Edward’s eyes opened wide as he desperately twisted his neck.

‘Snick’

A wound appeared around Edward’s neck along with a sound.

“Why?”

Edward’s question was filled with his doubts, but the spearman did not respond, and only continued to wield his spear. Soon, his body began to glow crimson. As Sungjin saw this, he thought,

‘Since there’s only two remaining... It seems that he wants to monopolize all the contribution...’

However, the spearman had chosen the wrong opponent. This was because Edward was one of the strongest, even amongst the ten final people. Edward dodged the spearman's attacks for a few seconds, but during this time he had already prepared himself for battle.

“Project Image.”

Edward's body divided into several clones. The spearman swung his spear quickly, but he only managed to hit afterimages. Edward used the gap when the spearman missed and struck the spearman's leg with his staff.

“Hrk!”

The spearman let out a grunt as he fell over. Edward used his staff to hit the hand of the spearman that was holding the spear.

“Ah!”

The hunter let go of his spear which was equivalent to his life and Edward kicked the spear far away. Afterwards, he placed his staff on the spearman's neck and asked,

“Why did you do that?”

As Sungjin saw this, he thought,

‘So there was a time when he was innocent, too...’

However, in that moment, the spearman took out the dagger he had hidden behind his back and sliced towards Edward's ankle.

“Ah!”

Having received an unexpected sneak attack, Edward fell backwards. The spearman held his dagger as he attempted to swoop down on his opponent.

“Blink.”

However, Edward's body glowed, and then appeared behind the spearman. The spearman held his dagger as he looked around, but

from this point, the fight was already over. Edward chanted a spell in a slightly saddened voice.

“Inner Burn.”

A fire erupted from the spearman’s entire body.

“Graaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

The sound of the spearman’s cries spread throughout the Giant’s Canyon. Edward stared at the burning spearman who was turning into cinders. His expression was strange that seemed to be both angry and sad. As Sungjin watched Edward, he thought to himself,

‘Well... I don’t really need to see something like this... Can’t we skip a bit further? Like to when we first met...’

At that moment, the scene changed. Edward was standing in a frost plain. It was the Frostplains in Chapter 11, where the witch lived.

‘Pew’

Soon, the figures of the other hunters appeared one by one near Edward. One of them was Sungjin. A Sungjin who was using the title ‘Elite Samurai’ instead of ‘Master Hunter’. Sungjin stared at his past self, however, something was strange. There was a strong feeling of disconnect. Sungjin soon realized the reason.

‘It wasn’t here?’

The very first time that Sungjin had met Edward was much later, in Chapter 16. He had never met Edward in Chapter 11. Surprised, Sungjin went closer to himself. His past self was shaking hands with Edward.

“I’m Edward. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m Sungjin. Let’s do our best.”

When Sungjin saw this, he wondered,

‘Did I meet him then... and then forget?’

The dreaming Sungjin considered it carefully. However, it was then that a detail caught his eye. And that detail was the sword that his past self was wearing. What was on his belt was not the crimson sheath of Blood Vengeance, but a sheath that had a white tiger carved on it. The dreaming Sungjin's eyes opened wide as he stared at the sheath.

‘What?’

It was here that Sungjin knew for certain that something was wrong. He had never used a sword like that. Not once.

Chapter 171 – Sungjin’s Dream (3)

“Roar~”

An immense hairy yeti charged at the past Sungjin who swung his sword in retaliation. Sungjin watched over his new past self with his arms crossed. The way this Sungjin wielded his blade or reacted to enemy attacks was not particularly different from his past self or the current him.

However, the weapon was different. He was wielding a sword that gave off a silver aura instead of the scarlet Blood Vengeance, or the blue-tinged glow of Moon Specter.

‘Is it... made of silver?’

Seeing that a few swings of the sword had effortlessly cut the yeti’s arm into slices, which were as thick as logs, it was easy to guess that the sword was at minimum a legendary tier weapon. In the midst of battle, one of the team members shouted, “Shit! There’s Ice Trolls behind us.”

Just as his past self turned around, a pack of trolls holding massive clubs appeared.

“There’s too many...”

The hunters were surrounded by the trolls. Sungjin’s past self looked around the area, then held up his sheath as he shouted, “Divine Protection of the Tiger Chieftain.”

The pair of tigers engraved on the sheath came out as spirits and paced around Sungjin. Finally, the fight began. The past Sungjin was the focus of the troll pack’s attacks, but each time, the tiger spirits would swing their paws and protect him.

“Roar!”

The dreaming Sungjin thought,

‘That skill... I’ve never even seen anyone else use that before...’

Though it seemed as if Sungjin's party had fallen into a critical situation, the fight was easier than expected.

“Ring of Fire”

This discrepancy between the expected outcome and reality was due to the efficiency of his past self and Edward's magic. After the fight was over, his past self swung his sword downwards through the air to remove the blood before sheathing it, like he had always done. When the dreaming Sungjin saw this, he thought, ‘... Even the habits are the same... It's definitely me, but... Just how did this happen?’

Sungjin thought to himself that he wanted to see his second meeting with Edward. The moment he finished the thought, the scene changed.

“Ohh, Sungjin, you're still alive.”

“Edward, you too... It's nice to see you again.”

The dreaming Sungjin looked around the area. The area seemed to be the Great Plains of Barrastan.

‘Again... It's different.’

According to his memories, the place that he had met Edward was not here, but at a later chapter. Edward asked his past self, “So, how have you been? From when we met until now?”

“Well... The monsters were more or less do-able... But I nearly died the last chapter to a troll.”

“Ahh... Trolls...”

His past self shook his head as he said,

“Just what's up with these retarded rules? To make us have to divide contribution amongst the comrades that we had fought together with. It's not just a few hunters that are dying because of these trolls.”

“Indeed... But we can't do anything about it. Since it's like this,

we can only do our best.”

The past Sungjin was still wearing the sword engraved with tigers. It was here that Sungjin came to a conclusion.

‘This... It’s definitely a past that I don’t remember... Then this means...’

Sungjin then thought to himself that he wanted to see Edward’s death. Soon, the scene changed. Edward was standing in a dark and gloomy prison. The moment Sungjin saw this, he thought, ‘This is... Chapter 18... Ser’corist Prison...’

According to what Sungjin remembered, Edward did not die here. He then looked around the area. There were five people, but one of them had a bluish body. When Sungjin saw this, he muttered, ‘... Ghost.’

A ghost was a type of substitute that appeared when there was an empty spot when dividing the hunters into teams of five. For example, if there were 24 hunters remaining, four of the parties would be fine, but there would be one party that had only four people.

It was then that a ‘ghost’ with a human appearance would appear and fill up that empty spot. Sungjin did not know if it was because his own luck was good, but he had never been in a party with one. However, according to others who had partied with a ‘ghost’, it was impossible to communicate with one and its abilities were slightly below that of the hunters.

According to their words, the ‘ghost’ was a hunter from the past that the Operator had ‘summoned’, but even they did not know exactly what that meant.

In any case, for there to be a ‘ghost’ in this party meant that Edward’s death was completely different from the death that Sungjin remembered. The man at the very front turned his head as he said, “Is everyone mentally prepared?”

However, he was someone familiar. The man was Illich from the final ten hunters.

‘Illich...’

In response to his words, a black man holding a spear hesitated before saying, ‘Hey, do we really have to do this? We’re the final four people. If we fail, then all of humanity will suffer. Let’s leave alone the Hidden Boss and finish the raid.’

It was the first time that Sungjin had ever seen this man’s face yet it was he who had identified himself as one of ‘the final 4’. Sungjin thought, ‘Then that means... As I thought... This raid... Is an event that occurred after my death.’

Edward said in response,

“Actually, that’s the reason why we have to kill the Hidden Boss. The reason that we could only make it this far is because we weren’t strong enough.”

Illich also spoke up.

“Yeah. What he said is right. In any case, if we can’t even clear this, then we can’t clear the next chapter. Let’s give it a try.”

The last remaining individual was an Asian man who was dual wielding two swords like himself. However, the man was bald and instead had a beard. This was also someone that Sungjin saw for the first time. The man stroked his beard as he said, “Yeah, whether we die this way or the other... Let’s at least give it a try.”

The man holding the spear was still afraid, but the other three had made up their minds to give it a try. The ‘ghost’ had no say in this matter. Finally, Illich pulled down the lever.

‘ChiChiChiChiChiChiChi’

Soon, along with the clatter of chains, the iron door in front of them began to open.

‘ChiChing!’

After a while, the sound of the chains stopped, and a groan filled with both fury and agony could be heard from the inside.

“Grooooooooooar”

The four hunters nervously searched their surroundings as they entered the prison. The moment they entered, the door shut noisily.

‘Clang!’

And simultaneously the Operator’s voice could be heard.

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

[‘100 man murderer’ Aizen has appeared!]

There was an immense giant inside the prison. Sungjin shivered as he looked at the Hidden Boss.

‘Aizen... It was incredibly tough for me as well. I don’t know about now, though...’

Aizen was a giant prisoner whose height reached 2.5 meters. Both of his hands were tied to a bastard sword that was as tall as he was by an iron chain. It made you wonder how he could possibly eat. Illich held up his shield and went to the front as he said, “Lets first get a feel for...”

However, even before he finished speaking, the prisoner yelled loudly and swung his sword.

“Groooooooooooooooooooooarrrrr!!!!”

Illich blocked the oncoming bastard sword with his shield, but his shield was crumpled and Illich was flung far away by that one strike.

‘That’s not something you can block. You have to avoid it...’

Sungjin noisily gave advice, but then he stopped. What he had requested was the scene of Edward’s death. The dream would show it to him.

Sure enough, the four hunters could only last a few seconds against the 100-man murderer Aizen and ultimately faced annihilation. Aizen attacked the hunters by spinning around like a windmill as he held his bastard sword.

Sometimes swinging high, sometimes swinging low. Inside the narrow prison, that flying bastard sword became terror itself. The swordsman and the spearman, as well as Illich, the tanker himself, could not deal with the bastard sword and could only retreat backwards. Edward, who was far away from it all, could chant short spells, but he could not use his specialty attack spells because he was too busy saving the retreating hunters.

“Heal!”

“Heal!”

“Heeal!”

In the end, the party could not do much and the hunters began to be picked off one by one. Starting with the archer ghost that disappeared after being hit by the sword, the spearman and the swordsman soon followed as they were both sent flying at the same time by the bastard sword. While Edward was debating on who to save, Illich charged towards Aizen in despair.

“Aahhhhhh!”

Unfortunately, Illich was turned into a pile of flesh by the chains that held up the bastard sword. Now, the only one remaining was just Edward. Aizen swung his bastard sword towards Edward, who shone for a moment.

“Blink”

He was able to escape from that position, but his luck wasn't so good; the location where he appeared just happened to be where Aizen's bastard sword was finishing its swing. Without any further ado, Edward was split in half.

“Gah...”

Edward could not even let out a cry of pain. He swung his arm a few times towards the ceiling and then died just like that. Soon, he could hear the Operator's voice.

[You have died.]

[You were humanity's very last remaining Player.]

[Benefit awarded to the last player to die is "Restart"]

At the same time, a single line of text appeared before his eyes.

Restart – Redo the hunt from the very beginning, but with current memory.

Edward then looked around his surroundings with wide eyes. A white square room. It was a familiar place for him. He screamed, "What?!"

However, without even the time for him to say more, the Operator said, [A hunt will soon begin. Prepare for combat.]

As he saw this, the dreaming Sungjin thought,

'As expected... Edward really did regress once.'

At that moment, the Operator's voice could suddenly be heard, [The Chosen One has requested your teleportation.]

Sungjin woke up to the jarring voice of the Operator.

[Will you accept the request for teleportation?]

Together with the Operator's question, came Serin's voice, "Oppa, what about today's breakfast? Are we not eating together?"

Sungjin turned his head. Serin's face could be seen above the Cube.

"Ah... Yeah..."

"Wait, Oppa, did you sleep in?"

"Yeah... What time is it right now?"

“What do you mean what time. It’s time for the morning briefing.”

“Ahh... I see. Just wait a moment. I’ll summon everyone soon.”

“Okay.”

Sungjin got up from his bed and hurriedly washed his face and changed his clothes, before walking down to the first floor of Ninety Nine Nights. He then took out the Sceptre of the Warlord and summoned the other hunters.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

The hunters greeted each other. Franz said with an energetic voice, “What should I eat today... Does anyone have a recommendation? Something that Dalupin is good at making.”

To which Baltren responded,

“Have you tried his cereal? This guy’s cereal is strangely delicious.”

“Ahh, then should I try that?”

Nada also joined the discussion.

“Should I try it as well?”

As the rowdy conversation went back and forth, Sungjin thought about the dream that he had been dreaming until just a moment ago.

‘Edward was someone who had restarted even before I did. Then I... Why did he...’

Chapter 172 – Bakash Island (1)

After finishing breakfast, the hunters bid each other farewell and departed.

“See you at dinner time, everyone.”

“Yeah, do your best, everyone.”

“You too!”

Though the others were animatedly exchanging farewells, Sungjin merely held up his hand and waved to them. This was because Sungjin had been thinking about Edward since even before the hunters gathered together.

‘... Edward ... restarted once... Then that guy... did he do all of that... knowing that I would go back in time?’

‘But even if that’s the case... Was there a reason for him to troll?’

However, at that moment,

“Oppa.”

Upon hearing someone calling to him, Sungjin raised his head.

There was only one person that called him ‘Oppa’. Sungjin looked at Serin with eyes wide open in surprise as he asked,

“Hrm? You haven’t left yet?”

“Yes. Since today, you didn’t say much again... I was worried that you were still... angry at me.”

Sungjin waved his hand as he said,

“Ahh... No. It’s just... I was thinking about something else.”

“Is that so? What a relief. Hehe.”

Serin smiled cutely. Seeing her smile, Sungjin also grinned as he said,

“Go on. It’s time for me to prepare myself as well.”

“Ok. Then... See you later, Oppa.”

Serin waved her hand as she disappeared. Now alone, Sungjin patted the seat as he stood up. There were too many questionable points in the information that he had, but there was nothing he could do about it for the moment.

‘... Let’s look at it once more tonight. I should be able to learn more about it as I sleep.’

The next raid was Bakash Island, the primordial island where dinosaurs roamed. It was a place that was swarming with enemies whose sizes defied common sense. However, it was not a difficult raid so long as you were careful of their sizes. As the raid was approaching, Sungjin took out ‘Lathion – Star of Solitude’ and was about to use its Active Skill, “Solitary Training”.

“Solitary...”

But when he thought about it, it occurred to him that it might be better not to use it anymore. Few stats or coins were no longer what Sungjin needed; what he really needed were allies who could go to the end with him.

‘Instead of earning stats by myself... It would be better to finish the raids with other hunters and choose one or two more members.’

Having made up his mind, Sungjin placed the star back inside the cube.

[The raid is beginning in 10 seconds. 10, 9, 8...]

‘Pew’

Sungjin was teleported to Bakash Island. Dinosaurs could be seen wandering about in the distance making this place looked as if the set from the movie Jura**** Pa** had been moved here as is.

‘Pew’

When one of the hunters that had been summoned to Bakash

Island saw his surroundings, his jaw dropped.

“Woah...”

Sungjin glanced at him. The first time he saw this, he had also displayed a similar reaction. However, this was already his second time experiencing this. Rather than watching the dinosaurs, Sungjin slowly examined the other hunters who were staring at them. Now, everyone had fancy equipment, befitting of veterans who had experienced dozens of life-and-death crises. Of course, Sungjin was the only one who had equipped four swords.

‘That friend over there has a Legendary armor. Was it Sargon’s Armor... Hrm... But his weapon... I think I saw it hanging in some shop... Did he buy it with Black Coins...’

‘He’s wielding a magic staff engraved with runes and a shield... Is he some kind of combat mage?’

Sungjin looked at them as if he were shopping in a mall. However, as he was watching them, a Caucasian spearman wielding a long spear locked gazes with Sungjin, then let out a cry.

“Oh!”

He pointed at Sungjin with his finger and asked,

“Master Hunter... Master Hunter Kei?”

Sungjin stared at the spearman as he searched his memories.

‘... Where did I meet him?’

However, he could not recall when they had met. No matter how he thought about it, it was definitely the first time that they had seen each other. He had difficulty telling apart people of different races that he had come across during the raids – in truth, Whites, Blacks, Arabs, Hispanics, etc, all looked the same to him. While Sungjin had a pinched expression, the hunter approached and asked,

“Right? Master Hunter. Master Hunter Kei.”

“Ah, yes... That’s me, but...”

Sungjin’s words trailed off, but the hunter suddenly came closer and held out his hand as he said,

“Ohh, I heard a lot about you, Master Hunter Kei.”

Sungjin absentmindedly shook the hunter’s hand. The latter continued,

“It’s an honor to meet you.”

‘Just what makes it an honor...’

While Sungjin was bewildered, another hunter who was behind him came up to him.

“Master Hunter Kei? You’re that... Legend?”

He did not know why, but it seemed that he had become quite famous. Sungjin asked the hunters,

“Do you... know me?”

The spearman that had extended his hand earlier spoke up,

“I heard about you from the other hunters. That there’s a person who jumps across dimensions to hunt trolls.”

The hunter next to Sungjin also added,

“I’ve also heard of that. That you even fought two or three trolls alone.”

It seemed that the other two hunters were intrigued by seeing the three of them gathered together like that.

“What? Master Hunter? Is he someone famous?”

“Hrm... I think I’ve heard about him, too...”

It seemed that Sungjin had become well-known to the other hunters since he had killed dozens of trolls as well as saved many more lives when he jumped from one dimension to another. Now that he thought about it, he did recall hearing something like that

from one of the ‘Chosen Ones’ while eating.

“Now that I think about it, there were people talking about Mister Kei during a raid.”

“Yeah, I heard about that too. That there’s an incredibly strong hunter jumping across dimensions to hunt trolls... Kei should be the only one that fits that description, right?”

Back then, he had simply thought, ‘Is that so?’ and threw it to the back of his mind, but now it seemed that he had truly become rather famous.

[The raid will begin in 1 minute.]

Upon hearing the Operator, the two hunters nodded their heads as they spoke up.

“It’s an honor to be in the same party as you.”

“I guess we’ll get to see Mister Kei’s skills. I leave myself in your hands.”

For now, Sungjin simply nodded as he wondered if there was anyone among these hunters who was decently skilled, and if it would be alright to accept him as a teammate.

*

‘Kyeee!’

A lengthy cry reverberated throughout the jungle. The gladiator standing at the front raised his shield as he said,

“Incoming.”

The hunters beside him each took ahold of their weapons upon hearing his words. Kei, of course, held up Blood Vengeance and Moon Specter as he prepared to fight against the enemy. Eventually, raptors with long necks revealed their figures one by one from inside the jungle.

‘Kyeeeeee!’

The hunters' arms tensed as they held onto their weapons. If he wanted to, Sungjin could cut down the raptors in an instant, but he merely gripped Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance instead of intervening because he wanted to see how the hunters fought.

“Come Forth! The Circle of Justice!”

When the shield-bearing man finished shouting, the gazes of the raptors snapped towards him.

‘Hrm... Is that a skill that attracts aggro...’

However, the gladiator had used it far too early. His skill had affected only the first few raptors leaving the others that appeared afterwards to their own devices.

‘Kyaaaa!’

Because of this, the raptors charged towards the spearman, the magician, the archer, and of course, Sungjin, who were standing behind the gladiator. The tank became flustered when he saw the raptors circle past him, and looked back at them even as he was facing off against some raptors that were attacking him.

“Uhhhhhh...”

Sungjin hit away a few of the raptors that charged at him as he thought,

‘That guy’s equipment is decent, but his talent in tanking is just so-so.’

Sungjin observed the other hunters during the chaos that occurred. The magician cast,

“Illusion”

and created a few illusions as he retreated backwards. He then used his magic staff to crush the raptors’ skulls while the raptors were busy chasing around the duplicates. Sungjin watched all of this from the corner of his eyes.

‘In addition to his skills in magic... His physical abilities are

decent as well.'

When Sungjin wasn't looking, the archer had put away his bow and taken out two daggers. He held a dagger in each hand as he spun around like a windmill and ripped through the raptors' hides. The raptors that had been charging like wild dogs could no longer approach the archer because of that tornado-like storm of knives. Sungjin thought,

'This guy is also decent. He isn't limited to just arrows and he's great in adapting to the situation.'

The problem was the spearman. Because the spearman was wielding a spear that was as tall as him, he was constantly besieged by the raptors' slashes from inside that range.

"Go... Go away! These bastards..."

When the spearman came under attack, Sungjin glanced towards the tanker. The tank who was supposed to be protecting the spearman. Unfortunately, the tanker was too busy blocking the attacks of the raptors that he had provoked. Upon seeing this, Sungjin thought,

'The tanker lacks the ability, and the spearman can't adapt to the situation. For them to become Chosen Ones, these two are...'

However, at that moment Moon Specter shouted at him.

'Master!'

Sungjin abruptly came to attention and found that there were a huge set of teeth right in front of his nose.

'Shit!'

Sungjin urgently threw back his head. Soon, the raptor's teeth snapped shut where his head used to be.

'Snap!'

It was a spectacle that would've chilled a normal person. However, having overcome dozens of life-and-death situations and

even having actually died once, this was merely an opportunity to Sungjin. He slightly twisted the hand that was holding Blood Vengeance, and the head of the raptor that had just attempted to tear off Sungjin's head soon began to spurt blood as it fell to the ground. But, this was not the end.

‘Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!’

Upon seeing the blood of their fellow raptor, two more charged towards Sungjin.

‘Annoying...’

Sungjin appropriately limited his strength as he fought against the raptors. This was because if he were to fight with everything he had, then it was entirely possible that the other hunters would not have a chance to fight. Sungjin lacklusterly swung his sword around to block the raptors' attacks while simultaneously watching how the other hunters reacted. After a few dozen seconds of chaos had passed, the situation was nearly settled. The hunter who had been given the role of tanking let out a sigh as he asked,

“Whew... Is everyone okay?”

At this, the spearman stooped over and leaned on his spear as he said,

“Me... Wait a bit.”

Now that they looked, there was a long wound on the spearman's waist. It seemed that he had been injured by a raptors' claws. The spearman removed a potion from his belt and said,

“Can we proceed after resting here for...”

However, it was at that moment that the sound of an immense footstep could be heard from the depths of the forest as the ground began to shake.

‘Boom!’

Chapter 173 – Bakash Island (2)

‘Boom!!’

The hunters simultaneously turned to look towards the jungle.

‘Boom!!!’

The sound was steadily getting louder. Someone whispered,

“Is that...”

He did not finish speaking, but everyone could roughly guess what he wanted to say. The spearman quickly began to gulp down the potion that he was holding.

‘Boom!!!!’

[Warning!]

[The Devourer ‘Kiazen’ has appeared.]

Soon, the figure of an enormous Tyrannosaurus could be seen towering above the canopy.

Someone quietly muttered,

“Damn...”

Everyone was extremely tense except for Sungjin. Soon the enormous Tyrannosaurus, Kiazen the Devourer, came out of the jungle.

“Brilliant Protection!”

An intense light came surging out of the tanker’s shield.

‘Grr~’

The Tyrannosaurus averted its eyes due to the intense brightness.

‘Is he blinding it with the light... That guy really does have good items...’

Attacks from long-ranged damage dealers soon followed. First, the archer released an arrow.

“Exploding Arrow.”

The arrow that he fired landed directly on the Devourer Kiazen’s right eye and exploded.

‘Booom!’

As the name suggested, it created an immense explosion. All of the hunters watched the blast closely.

‘Did it work?’

However, after a brief moment, Kiazen glared at the hunters with a terrifying eye that had transformed to that of a panda’s.

‘It was a good idea to aim for the eye, but... the timing wasn’t good. If the tanker made the boss close its eyes, then it would’ve been great if he had delayed his attack by just a little... Or he could have aimed for the neck which was narrower in comparison to that head...’

The archer was also a bit lacking, unfortunately, in combat instincts. Next, the magician began to chant a spell.

“The Source of Strength, Destroy my Enemies! Light of Ashurian!”

A light violently blazed up in the magician’s hand before scattering in various directions.

‘Boom! Boom! Boboom!’

The rays of light would explode each time they came into contact with Kiazen’s body, shaking him from side to side. The hunters shifted their gaze towards the boss in unison.

‘Did it work?’

But after a short while, Kiazen bellowed even more furiously towards the hunters. When Sungjin saw this, he thought,

‘Before, he was great in adapting to the situation... But it seems that his Magic Power isn’t up to par since he invested Stat Points towards his physical abilities.’

If the team’s primary magician was bought enough time to finish a chant, then he must have the ability to deal a critical blow to the enemy.

‘When compared to Mustafa... or Edward... He is nowhere near as good...’

The two that he had some hopes for ended up disappointing him. Just in case, Sungjin asked Besgoro for his opinion,

“Mr. Besgoro, what do you think about them?”

‘Hrm? Who?’

“The skills of these people.”

‘No matter how you look at it, they seem to be worse than your teammates, whether it’s that bow-using miss or that miss with the big boobs... or that guy wielding the greatsword.’

“As expected, that’s the case.”

It looked like there was no one in this party that was worthy of being taken all the way to the end as an ally. Even if you took into consideration the bonuses that the current ‘Chosen Ones’ received from the title, these people were nowhere close to the level of ability of the ‘Chosen Ones’. While Sungjin was appraising them,

“Gaaaah”

“Kaghk!”

The spearman was sent flying into the sky by Kiazen’s foot, and the archer was slammed onto the ground. The rather exasperated tanker shouted towards Sungjin.

“Hey! Master Hunter! Just what are you doing?”

It was then when Sungjin realized that he was standing idly by

and conversing with Besgoro while his teammates were dying.

“Aahh... Sorry.”

The tanker shouted angrily,

“Is being sorry enough? We’re all about to die!”

Sungjin took out Rajenta’s egg from his vest and threw it into the air as he said,

“Don’t worry. There’s no need for me to observe you anymore.”

Rajenta broke out of the egg and shouted loudly as he circled widely around Kiazen.

“Kyaaaang!”

Kiazen was wary of Rajenta and attempted to bite him, but couldn’t keep up as Rajenta was too quick. Sungjin shouted at Rajenta,

“Over here! Rajenta, there’s no time to play around.”

At Sungjin’s words, Rajenta obediently flew over to Sungjin’s side. Sungjin jumped up slightly and climbed onto Rajenta’s back.

“Rajenta, we’re aiming for that guy’s head. Besgoro, match our timing and activate Frenzy.”

‘Okay’

Sungjin, who had only been holding onto his swords loosely, now tightly grasped his Blood Vengeance and Moon Specter. Rajenta followed his master’s orders and ascended into the air above Kiazen’s head with Sungjin on his back.

‘3, 2... 1’

Sungjin looked for the right timing before he jumped down from Rajenta’s back directly onto Kiazen’s head. At the same time, Besgoro’s helmet turned crimson. Within mere seconds after he had descended, Sungjin had torn apart the Tyrannosaurus’s head with Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance. Kiazen, whose head had

suffered from several dozen wounds in an instant, let out a pitiful cry that did not match its gargantuan size as it collapsed.

“Kyaaaaaaaaann!!”

Right before Sungjin hit the ground, Rajenta caught his master on his back and leisurely flew up towards the sky. While Sungjin took in the wind from atop Rajenta’s back, the Operator’s voice rang out.

[Boss monster ‘Kiazen’ Cleared]

Sungjin told Rajenta who was carrying him,

“Good job Rajenta.”

“Kyang”

Rajenta cried out happily before he dropped Sungjin off near where the other hunters were gathered. They were all gaping blankly at Sungjin. It was to be expected since Sungjin had massacred the boss all by himself in a few seconds while the four could not do much despite working together.

“A... Amazing, Master Hunter Kei.”

“I thought the rumors were exaggerated but... You’re actually even stronger instead...”

Sungjin, embarrassed by their compliments, waved his hand as he said,

“Erm well, that’s enough of that.”

The hunters ran towards Sungjin and began to bombard him with various questions.

“How did you become so strong?”

“What are those swords? Are they both Legendary items?”

“That helmet doesn’t look ordinary either...”

“Wait, first, aren’t your stats incredibly high? Did you really earn them honestly?”

Sungjin broke out into a cold sweat as he attempted to calm the hunters down.

“No... I...”

Sungjin looked behind him and made a gesture to Rajenta.

‘Let’s go.’

Rajenta caught on.

“Kyaaang!”

Rajenta spread his wings and strolled to Sungjin’s side. When the enormous griffon walked towards them with his wings opened wide, the hunters felt a sense of oppression and stumbled backwards.

“In any case... Since the boss is dead... I’ll be taking my leave now.”

“Going? Where?”

As always, he couldn’t explain everything about his circumstances. Sungjin mounted Rajenta, then said,

“I’m going to go kill the Hidden Boss by myself. You guys should kill the other monsters before you leave. Then, farewell.”

The hunters extended their hands towards Sungjin as if they were fans meeting a celebrity.

“Master Hunter Kei!”

“Mister Kei!”

Having left those words, Sungjin rode Rajenta up into the sky. The hunters stranded on the ground did not chase after Sungjin all the way up here. Sungjin then let out a sigh.

“Whew... They were really clingy...”

Besgoro suddenly interjected,

‘Why didn’t you give them some tips on getting stronger?’

Especially that spearman. He seemed to be of a decent sort.'

Sungjin thought about the conversation that had just occurred.

'That helmet doesn't look ordinary either...'

Of course, the one who said this was someone holding a spear in his hand – the spearman.

"... It's fine Mister. Now let's see... The Hidden Boss's egg is..."

At that moment, Rajenta began to turn towards the side.

"What... Why... Rajenta!"

Sungjin was flustered at first, but once he saw the immense nest in front of him, he realized that Rajenta had found the target first.

"Great job, Rajenta. Let's go."

*

'Boom~'

The corpse of the gigantic pterodactyl fell into the jungle with a loud noise. The Operator's voice could be heard,

[Hidden Boss, 'Tyrant of the Skies, Karez'aard' Cleared.]

Sungjin praised his Summon, who was holding onto him,

"Great job, Rajenta."

"Kyang"

Now that he had killed the Hidden Boss, there was nothing in particular left for him to do in this raid.

'What is really important is gathering allies, but it's already too late for that... Should I go hunting for trolls...'

Just as he was thinking about it, he heard the sound of someone calling for him.

[The Chosen One has requested your teleportation.]

'What happened?'

Sungjin immediately looked towards his Operator Cube. Nada's figure appeared above it.

"Hey there, Kei. I think that man you called Mustafa is in my party?"

Sungjin asked her,

"Mustafa? Is he a Mustafa that's really skinny, has a long mustache and uses magic? The name Mustafa is pretty common in the Middle East after all."

"Yeah, he's super skinny, has a long mustache and is good at using magic. Come and see for yourself."

Sungjin nodded his head.

"Understood. I'll be right there."

Sungjin immediately left the dimension and teleported into Nada's world after receiving his title and rewards.

She was waiting for him with her usual leather armor removed and sporting just a tank top instead. Nada fanned her curvaceous body as she complained,

"Ugh... It's too hot and humid here. How can I wear armor when I'm this sweaty."

Sungjin looked elsewhere as he was afraid that he would make a mistake once again.

"So, Mustafa?"

"Over there, resting in the jungle. Right now it's break time."

Sungjin looked in the direction that she pointed towards. A group of hunters sat in a circle under the shade of a tree as they rested. Sungjin discovered Mustafa sitting amongst them wearing a white robe and holding a staff, the head of which was shaped like a snake's. The color of his robe and the form of his staff were quite different from before, but that thin physique and long mustache had undeniably confirmed his identity. Sungjin could not help but

exclaim in surprise as he walked towards Mustafa.

“Woah!”

The hunters were startled when they saw Sungjin and picked up their weapons. It was a rather natural response. Normally, all life forms in this dimension were enemies except for the five that had gathered at the start. But not one of them attacked the human with the title ‘Master Hunter’ over his head who was making his way towards them. Furthermore, Sungjin had kept his weapons sheathed as he walked towards the hunters unarmed. While they were dumbfounded by this, Sungjin quickly approached Mustafa and shook his hand.

“It’s great to meet you at last, Mr. Mustafa.”

Chapter 174 – Black Market Fifteenth Shopping (1)

As Sungjin shook his hand, Mustafa stood there blankly for a moment, before shaking him off and asking,

“Who are you, do you know me?”

Sungjin was flustered but quickly regained his calm. Mustafa’s response was to be expected. A raid was a battle where one placed his life on the line. Hunters were always tense because of the enemies, as well as their allies who might turn out to be trolls. With this in mind, it was natural to reject a hunter who approached you and abruptly started shaking your hand even though it was the first time you’ve met him. Sungjin began to introduce himself,

“Ahh, my apologies Mustafa. I am...”

At that time, one of Mustafa’s teammates who had been resting in the back suddenly jumped up and pointed at Sungjin as he spoke.

“Hrm? Master Hunter? Master Hunter Kei?”

Sungjin stared at him. For some reason, he looked familiar.

“Do you remember me? We met inside the Dragon’s Lair.”

It was the ‘Barbarian’ that had been one of the two people to tank Khal Gal. His outfit and his weapon had changed, but Sungjin still remembered him.

“Ahh, I do remember you. So you’ve made it this far safely.”

“Yes, my luck was good. After we separated then, I wanted to meet you at least one more time and we’ve come to meet like this. I’ve heard stories about Master Hunter Kei from the other hunters.”

As he had expected, it seemed that there were stories about him circulating amongst the hunters. The ‘Barbarian’ reassured Mustafa.

“Ahh, Mustafa there’s no need to be on guard. This person is Master Hunter Kei. He’s not a troll. On the contrary, he’s a famous troll hunter.”

The suspicion in Mustafa’s eyes diminished when he heard the words of the ‘Barbarian’. He glanced at the four swords that Sungjin had equipped before saying,

“Hrm... I think I’ve heard about him as well. A swordsman wielding four swords that goes teleporting through the dimensions in order to hunt trolls.”

Sungjin beamed. It would be easier to talk if things were like this.

“However, what is your purpose in coming here? Is there a troll in our party?”

Mustafa inconspicuously looked at the three people that he was sitting with. The other three hunters flinched, before they each spoke up.

“Not me, Mustafa.”

“Me neither.”

“We worked together before, didn’t we, Mustafa.”

‘As expected... His skill from before is still there.’

Just by seeing this, Sungjin knew that Mustafa had an incredible influence over the party. For someone to have great influence over a group of people who had just met, it could only mean that he was powerful. Sungjin asked Mustafa and his teammates,

“Do you mind if... Mustafa and I talk by ourselves for a moment?”

Mustafa’s teammates all nodded their heads, while Mustafa was the only one who had a troubled expression.

“We had planned to rest for only 5 minutes before continuing on with the raid... There’s also a lady who’s off resting by herself...”

At that, Nada came out of nowhere and spoke up,

“I’m okay with that as well.”

She was wearing her leather armor once again.

“Please go speak with him and then come back.”

Having received the agreement of the other hunters, Sungjin and Mustafa separated from them before the two began to converse. Though this party would not actually be short on time with both Nada and Mustafa in it, but since the group had said that they were in a rush, Sungjin, taking it in consideration, got straight to the point.

“I’m gathering teammates. Strong teammates that can make it to the final raid. Ten people, including me.”

Mustafa quickly understood what Sungjin was saying.

“So, what you’re saying is that you’re picking out ten elite members to enter the final raid with?”

Sungjin nodded his head. Then, to make his proposal more appealing, he added,

“That’s right. If you accept my ‘Choosing’, then you will receive the ‘Chosen One’ title which will give you an incredible bonus to your Stat Points. What do you think?”

However, Mustafa was interested in something other than the bonus stats that Sungjin could offer.

“From your point of view... You mean to say that only ten people will remain alive out of all of these hunters?”

Sungjin did not deny it.

“That’s right. It’s a realistic assessment.”

“Hrm...”

Mustafa fiddled with his mustache and did not speak up for a long time. He seemed to be lost in thought. He briefly muttered to himself.

“Elite... Elite... God’s will... Is he talking about that?”

Sungjin was incredibly nervous as he was afraid that Mustafa would reject his offer.

‘If he rejects it...’

Before Sungjin could finish his thought, Mustafa nodded his head.

“Good. What do I have to do to become your teammate?”

*

After finishing the raid and returning to the Black Market, Sungjin immediately headed towards the cafe. He was extremely thirsty after roaming through the jungle for several hours.

“Iced Americano. Cold.”

This time, after ordering, Sungjin added,

“Ah, right. I’ll have it as a takeaway today.”

“Understood, Mister Hunter.”

Sungjin did this because now there was no point in him visiting the Auction House anymore. The merchant of Darker than Black had disappeared off somewhere. Now that he had no place to use Black Coins, he no longer had any reason to earn them either.

‘As for the remaining Black Coins, I should give them to the other hunters if they need any...’

Furthermore, this time he had only managed to hunt a single troll before the Raid got over. Rather than lacking the time to hunt for them, it was because the Trollseeker Marble could not find any trolls and kept reporting,

[No applicable dimension available].

In truth, he had expected this a long time ago. Though the marble could originally find trolls immediately upon use, now the time it took to find them grew longer and longer until finally it did not activate even when the Raid was ending. This meant that now, there were not many trolls remaining amongst the hunters, and even if there were, the trolls did not commit the act.

‘Well... It’s about time for the spring to dry up.’

It was not something particularly inconvenient. This was because Sungjin’s main goal was to ‘gather allies’. This time he had managed to recruit the highly qualified Mustafa, so one could describe this raid as very successful.

‘Good.’

Sungjin drank his coffee from a lightweight plastic cup as he headed towards Kargos’s smithy. If things turned out as promised, then the crafting of the gem should be finished by now. However, Sungjin was surprised when he finally arrived at the smithy. Even just yesterday, the place had been as busy as it could possibly be, but now no one could be seen inside it. Besgoro asked,

‘What’s this? Where did they all go?’

Sungjin found himself walking faster towards the smithy. However, when he came near the place, he began to hear an incredibly loud snoring noise.

‘Snnrrrk’

The sound came from behind the anvil. When he approached it, Sungjin found Kargos snoring in his sleep.

‘Snnrrrk’

Kargos was snoring so loudly that Sungjin felt bad about the thought of waking him up. Instead, Sungjin looked around the smithy. A small iron box could be seen near him. He did not wake Kargos up and walked towards the box instead. There was an indentation in the shape of a hand on the box, as if someone had

pressed his hand into clay. Sungjin peered at the indentation closely.

‘What’s this?’

He quickly came to the realization that the shape and size of the indentation were exactly the same as that of his own hand.

‘... Did they make it... As a copy of my hand?’

Sungjin briefly considered whether it was possible. If it was Kargos, then he believed that it was completely plausible given his skill. After all, since the beginning, the swords that he used had all passed through Kargos’s hands at least once. Sungjin carelessly placed his right hand on the indentation. As expected, his hand fit perfectly. Then, the box opened with a burst of air.

‘Pssh~’

A brilliant blue light began to shine from inside the box. Sungjin opened up the entire lid. Inside there was a blue gem in the form of a star. It was a gem that had the exact same shape as the one Edward had held. Sungjin carefully brought it up and examined it. As opposed to its size, it was rather light. Sungjin held it above his head, and soon an explanation window for the item appeared.

Ios – The Revelation of the Stars

Mythological Accessory

Active Skill

Starlight (I) – You can see what will occur 24 hours in the future from now. If the user exerts his will, then it is possible to change the future. Can be used once a day.

I hold within me the Vision of the Gods

On this day, a new pair of eyes opened from within me.

‘... What?’

The explanation was not particularly long, but Sungjin stared at it for a while. This was because the description of the Active Skill was rather shocking.

‘You can see what will occur 24 hours in the future from now?’

Sungjin’s mind became chaotic. He had been taken aback by the Dragon’s eye mask which let him look into the past, but this item was even more surprising than that.

‘Just what is...’

He turned his head and briefly looked at the sleeping form of Kargos.

‘Snrrrrrrrrrk...’

Sungjin wondered if Kargos collapsed in exhaustion after he finished crafting the star-shaped accessory, as he was sleeping incredibly soundly. Sungjin looked between the star and Kargos a few times, before he felt apologetic and decided not to wake Kargos up.

‘... He’s probably like this because of working on this...’

Sungjin placed the star inside his vest before turning around. After having done so, he worried about simply leaving the box there, but then had a thought,

‘Well... I should be the only one who can unlock the locking device... He’ll probably think that I took it.’

Kargos was someone who had confidence in his work. He would know that only Sungjin could open the locking device and take away the gem. In the first place, Sungjin was the only person in this dimension anyways. Sungjin left Kargos alone and returned to Ninety Nine Nights.

“Good job today as well, Mister Hunter.”

Dalupin greeted him, but Sungjin halfheartedly returned the greeting before heading towards his room like the wind. He sat

down on a chair next to the window before taking out the accessory again. The star-shaped gem was shining brilliantly with a blue light.

‘This is... Truly beautiful.’

Sungjin briefly lost himself in the captivating blue radiance. It was just like that time in the last raid when Edward took out the star for a moment. A thought suddenly came to Sungjin as he was stroking the star.

‘Wait so then... During the last raid... That guy saw into the future with this? 24 hours into the future?’

It was right before the battle with the Demon King. At that time, Edward’s expression had changed after looking at this. Afterwards, he trolled as he began to kill everyone in the party. It was not clear yet whether Edward had done so on purpose, but with his own death, he had Sungjin go through regression.

‘24 hours after that point in time... Just what was going to happen in the future... Just what did Edward see...’

Sungjin did not know what Edward saw, but it was obvious that what he had witnessed had an enormous impact on him.

‘Since the Demon King’s Castle is Chapter 20... That means that something had happened in Chapter 21...’

However, he was unable to figure it out right now. He could not discover what Edward had seen since the eye mask that the Dragon had given him would only show him what had occurred in the past.

‘In any case, it seems that I can only wait for more time to pass...’

Sungjin examined the shining star from various angles, before he wondered to himself,

“But... when will I be able to use this?”

Chapter 175 – Black Market Fifteenth Shopping (2)

At dinner time, Mustafa was welcomed to the team under Franz's lead.

“Now then, let's all give the newly invited Mustafa a welcoming applause.”

Mustafa held a glass filled with apple juice at the crowded table. He looked at Sungjin and the other Chosen Ones as he said,

“For hunters to be able to gather like this and have dinner together... What a remarkable sight...”

“It's been a while since you were last able to talk to others like this, right? You'll get used to it soon.”

“Indeed. It was a good decision to come to this gathering between the ‘One who Chooses’ and the ‘Chosen Ones’.”

Mustafa briefly looked around before he added,

“I have a large family. At home, we would always sit together at a huge table like this as we shared our meals, so I was not used to dining alone. However, after coming here... I had to eat by myself for a while... Because of this, every time during dinner I could not help but think of my family.”

The mood became a touch gloomier once the topic of his family was brought up. Perhaps he realized this, as Mustafa immediately changed the subject.

“However, it is great to be able to eat a meal with others like this again. Let us gather our strengths and finish these accursed raids so that we may save those we love.”

“Indeed.”

“Yeah!”

At first, Mustafa was a bit solemn as he kept his guard up, but soon he relaxed and began to get along with the other hunters. He had acted the same with the previous final ten people as well. It was something that made Sungjin a little relieved. Throughout the meal, there was a buzz of excitement in the air from gaining a new comrade. After some time had passed, Sungjin surreptitiously got up from his seat. When he did so, Serin and a few other hunters looked at Sungjin with a questioning gaze. Sungjin waved his hand as he said,

“Ah. Restroom. Be right back.”

Soon, the hunters turned their attention back towards their various eating utensils. Sungjin moved towards the back and entered the restroom. He locked the door, just in case another person wanted to come in, before taking out the star-shaped accessory that he had picked up today from his vest.

The reason that Sungjin chose to use an item that let him see the future at this time when everyone was having dinner was simple: if he was having the meal with the same members during tomorrow's dinner, then it meant that tomorrow's raid would have been safely completed as well.

“Starlight.”

The shining star-shaped accessory gave off an even brighter light for an instant; it was a brilliant radiance that was almost blinding. When the light filled up the restroom in which Sungjin stood, the future began to unfold before him.

Franz shouted as he held up a glass filled with orange juice,

‘In this moment, a new ally has joined us. Let's give him our blessings. Congratulations!’

Sungjin tilted his head in confusion,

‘What? This... Isn't this what happened just a moment ago?’

However, the person being welcomed was a different person.

‘Thank you for the warm reception.’

It was a young man with a katana equipped on both sides of his waist.

‘I am truly moved to be reunited with my master, as well as find teammates on top of that.’

A familiar face. It was the young man he had met at Greysoul Cemetery, the swordsman Hiroaki. Sungjin felt joyous, but decided to figure out the situation first.

‘This is... Something that is happening tomorrow?’

He could see Mustafa clapping his hands on the side. Therefore, what he was seeing now was not what had happened today. Sungjin glanced at the other hunters. Serin, Nada, Franz, Mahadas, and Baltren were all energetically smiling as they applauded.

‘Good. If it’s like this, then... Nothing should have happened.’

Afterwards, dinner proceeded with a slightly spirited atmosphere, similar to today’s dinner. Sungjin observed the proceedings in a relaxed mood. After a while, the surroundings suddenly began to grow darker, before turning pitch black like at Darker than Black. Alarmed, Sungjin wondered to himself,

‘What’s happening?’

Sungjin was back inside the restroom the next moment. He then gazed at the star-shaped accessory in his hands.

‘So it shows you about... 3 minutes of the future...’

This number was not exact, but a rough estimate. Sungjin placed the star inside his vest and unlocked the door to the restroom before stepping out. However, Baltren was standing in front of the door with a strange look. He slightly opened his mouth before staring at Sungjin as if there was something out of the norm.

“Uh...”

Was his act of looking into the future discovered? Sungjin asked him,

“Wh... What, Baltren?”

Baltren replied,

“No, it’s just... When you said that you were going to the restroom... For some reason, I also felt the need to use it, so I was going to wait for you to come out... But you unlocked the door and came out right after locking it... I just thought it was strange.”

Sungjin tilted his head.

“I did?”

“Yes.”

“You’re saying that, just now, I locked the door and then immediately opened it and came out.”

Baltren nodded his head again.

“I seeee.”

Though Sungjin had seen about three minutes of the future, to others, it was strange that he came out right after he had entered the restroom. Sungjin and Baltren stood there facing each other for a moment, when Sungjin came to realize that he was blocking the entrance to the restroom.

“Ah, right. Please go ahead.”

He got out of the way. Baltren looked at Sungjin with an inquiring gaze, but soon entered the restroom. It seemed that he really needed to use it. Sungjin returned to the dinner table and picked up some buckwheat noodles with his chopsticks as he thought about the last dream he had.

‘... Now that I think about it... I only saw Edward glowing for a moment... Then... Does time not flow when you’re looking at the future?’

In the first place, seeing the future was something that defied imagination, so it was reasonable for time to stop when he was looking into the future.

‘In any case... If it turns out like what the star had showed me... Then nothing in particular should occur tomorrow as well. That is, if I don’t do anything strange.’

Just as he had observed in Edward’s case, it was possible to change the future that you had seen. For example, tomorrow he could teleport to the other hunters’ dimensions and troll, but then he would be eating dinner by himself. Sungjin slurped up the buckwheat noodles as he made a promise to himself.

‘I’m going to go through tomorrow as ordinarily as I can. Ordinarily. Like I’ve always done.’

After dinner was over, Sungjin saw the other hunters off and then went to bed early. In the past, he had slept early in order to visit Darker than Black. Now, he did so in order to peek into Edward’s past.

‘I was able to see the future, but... That doesn’t mean I shouldn’t see the past.’

Sungjin put on the eye mask and fell asleep. Soon, Edward’s past began to unfold before his eyes.

*

The bones were glued together in the air. The lower jaw moved on its own as it incanted a spell.

“All-freezing winds! Razor-sharp ice! Blizzard Storm!”

As the Lich’s spell activated, Edward chanted a spell of his own.

“Spell-devouring magic field, Anti Magic Shield!”

It was as if he had already been prepared. Covered by a magic nullifying barrier, Edward ran towards the Lich. Upon seeing Edward charging at him, the Lich attempted to chant another

spell, but Edward struck the first blow.

“Be quiet! Silence!”

The Lich’s lower jaw clacked noisily several times against the upper jaw but it was unable to chant a spell. Edward did not let this opportunity go and incanted a spell directly into the Lich’s face.

“The sacred flames descend! Holy Fire!”

Soon, a pure white flame erupted on the Lich’s body. The Lich screamed in surprise.

“No! This spell?”

“Just what are youuuuuuuuuu...”

The flames spread to all of the bones that made up the Lich’s body in an instant. The other hunters could be seen standing behind Edward.

“A... Amazing, Edward.”

“How... Such spells?”

Edward received the same reactions that Sungjin had before. Then, they again spoke up.

“It was incredible. It was as if you knew which spells the Lich was about to use.”

Sungjin looked at that unknown hunter and thought,

‘That’s right. He’s fighting while knowing everything there is to know.’

Edward was using the foundation knowledge created by the lessons learnt from his previous attempt to incredible effects, similar to what Sungjin had done when he went back in time. Edward was able to obtain an incredibly high contribution in Count Dimitri’s Castle Ruins, Tahrakhan Plateau, and Dark Elven City and improve just like Sungjin.

However, there was something that Edward was lacking in.

Sungjin saw Edward giving up on fighting some of the strong Hidden Bosses when he failed to reach an agreement with the other hunters. This was the limit of someone who mainly used magic, like Edward.

To begin with, a mage could only shine when he or she was able to act freely in the rear during the fight. It seemed like it was not possible for one to go around ripping bosses apart solo like Sungjin had done.

Edward was born with an incredible talent for magic, but was hopeless when it came to using weapons. There were several occasions when he attempted to use weapons, and Sungjin even saw him investing points into dexterity.

But that was it. No matter how high his stats were, Edward would always fall behind in skill when compared to people like himself or Ryushin who had already trained for nearly their entire life before. Especially since there was no one teaching such techniques in the Raid.

In the end, unlike Sungjin, Edward chose to go all out with magic. From the beginning to the end, he threw everything into magic. Because of this, Edward couldn't help but skip over hidden bosses with incredible physical prowess such as the Dark Elven Swordsman Calian when he didn't have the support of his teammates. Because he had to skip a few Hidden Bosses, it was inevitable that he would receive lesser rewards than Sungjin.

When Sungjin saw all of this, he muttered,

‘Hrmph. I’m better than you, Edward.’

However, he suddenly felt his hair stand on end after he said that.

I’m better than you.

This might just be the reason why Edward had sent him back in time.

Chapter 176 – The Chosen Ones (1)

Sungjin clutched his forehead as he watched Edward. Edward was making his way through the raids by cooperating with the other hunters, as he had always done. There was never a time when he had acted as a troll, though there were cases in which he had consequently killed hunters who had attempted to troll. While watching Edward, Sungjin was almost certain.

‘This guy... There’s no mistaking it... Back then, he used that spell to send me back in time...’

As Sungjin considered this, he continued to observe Edward as he slept. After a while, he once again discovered something that shocked him.

‘Huh? This is...’

Edward was currently at Chapter 16, Kor’daum Bay, which was where he had first met Edward. But Sungjin was not there. Instead, Edward was hunting with four hunters that Sungjin had never seen before.

‘What? I definitely... met Edward here? It couldn’t be?’

Sungjin quickly thought,

‘... Show me the scene of Edward’s death.’

The view changed to a bizarre location where crystals could be seen floating above circular trays. The instant Sungjin saw this, he realized, ‘This is... Chapter 19... Khadhi Azel Magic University.’

If Edward died here, then it meant that what he had predicted was correct. He had not been here with Edward.

‘The first time he died was in Chapter 18... So he was able to go further by one chapter.’

Sungjin continued to observe the raid of the final eight hunters. Chapter 19, Khadhi Azel Magic University. Though it was called a

University, it was not a place that resembled a university campus. It was where absent-minded specters, who might have originally been students or professors, wandered about throughout the magically destroyed ruins.

‘Right, this is another of those places... Where you can’t predict what is going to happen.’

Sungjin watched Edward and the other hunters. What stood out immediately was the number of hunters. There were only eight of them, even though it was a ten-man raid.

‘... It seems that they have struggled incredibly hard to make it this far.’

The hunters who were barely able to defeat the monsters capable of using magic headed into a pure-white marble building at the center of the campus grounds. As Sungjin saw this, he thought back on his own blurry past.

‘... Hrm... Here...’

All of a sudden, a deafening voice could be heard.

“HOW DARE YOU DISRUPT THE STUDIES OF THE STUDENTS! YOU PIECE OF GARBAGE!”

Once he heard that voice, he remembered everything. Soon, the Operator’s voice could be heard saying, [Warning!]

[The Dean ‘Serdio’ has appeared.]

Quickly afterwards, a giant holding an immense staff appeared from inside the building. An interesting feature was that the giant was wearing a pair of spectacles. Sungjin clicked his tongue as he continued to observe.

‘With just eight... You can’t win against that guy. Normally, that is.’

Sure enough, the hunters began to fall one by one to the Dean’s spells. As a regressor, Edward was able to last until the very end

and put up a struggle. But eventually, he died while letting out a valiant cry.

“Graaaaah!!!”

He perished as the last human. Then once again, a voice could be heard.

[You have died.]

[You were humanity’s very last remaining Player.]

[Benefit awarded to the last player to die is “Restart”]

At the same time, a single line of text appeared before his eyes.

Restart – Redo the hunt from the very beginning, but with current memory.

Edward once again opened his eyes from within the white square room. After he looked at his surroundings, he screamed even more loudly than he had during his death just a moment ago.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!”

*

Sungjin opened his eyes after that shout. As soon as he got up, he took off the eye mask and swallowed once. He had vaguely expected it but actually seeing it had been more impactful.

‘As I thought... Edward didn’t regress only once.’

Sungjin looked out the window. The skies had already changed to a soft navy color.

‘... Is it almost dawn?’

Sungjin roughly washed his face before heading down to the first floor earlier than usual. As always, Dalupin was presiding over the first floor. Sungjin said to him, “Dalupin, please give me a slightly less sweet cafe mocha.”

Dalupin soon handed over a hot, steaming cup of coffee.

“Here you go, Mister Hunter.”

Sungjin accepted the cup and then cooled it down by blowing air onto it a few times.

Puff puff

He exited Ninety Nine Nights and walked outside. Next to the door, there was a small rocking chair. Sungjin was lost in thought as he sat down on it and watched the sunrise in the distance.

He had finally figured out most of the puzzle. Edward had gone back in time more than once and during all this, he had met Sungjin more than twice. And on their final meeting, after revealing a few secrets to Sungjin, instead of going back in time himself, he had sent Sungjin back in time by forcefully making him the last person alive. Sungjin knew that if Edward had wanted to be the last person alive, he could have easily done so.

‘It really does seem like he didn’t have malicious intent behind his trolling...’

Sungjin felt like all the pieces were falling into place one by one. The only thing that he was not able to find out yet was what Edward had seen in Chapter 21 during Chapter 20.

‘Just why did that guy... Choose me of all people?’

Although Sungjin did not know what it was, there might have been something that Edward could not do anything about in Chapter 21.

‘... Or... It might have been that he was too tired of going back in time again and again...’

This was also a possibility since even Sungjin himself had also felt disgusted by the thought of having to go through this game of carnage twice. When he was viewing Edward’s past, it was obvious that Edward had restarted at least twice. Sungjin sipped away at

his coffee as he contemplated on the matter. He came to a conclusion.

‘... It’s not clear exactly what Edward saw that caused him to troll, but... I have to do what I have to do. That is, to complete the raids which is what I had originally planned to do... And... It’s probably also the reason why Edward had sent me back in time.’

Sungjin held the empty coffee cup as he went back inside ‘Ninety Nine Nights’. According to the scene of the future that he had seen, Sungjin would come to meet Hiroaki the middle schooler swordsman in this raid, and he would join them as an ally. Not only was his skill decent, but he also had no reason to betray them, as he treated Sungjin like a teacher. It was natural that Hiroaki would join them as a teammate.

*

Sungjin narrowed his eyes as he swung his sword. The Nagas were cut down in droves as Sungjin continued his sword dance. The other four hunters followed behind Sungjin, but they did not have anything to do in particular.

Because the strength behind Sungjin’s attacks was significantly superior, the other hunters only assisted by taking care of the occasional scared and fleet-footed Nagas that tried to flee. The green blood of the Nagas was scattered all over Sungjin’s body. He looked around his surroundings as he thought, ‘Let’s see... It was definitely near this beach...’

Then, one of the other hunters pointed towards a cliff near the shoreline as he asked, “Hey, over there. Isn’t that a cave?”

Sungjin clapped his hands as he said,

“Ah, that’s right.”

That cave was where the Hidden Boss of Kor’daum Bay resided. As Sungjin plodded towards the cave, one of the hunters followed him. It was an incredibly tall man with the title ‘Terminator’ who

wielded a halberd that matched him well. The ‘Terminator’ approached Sungjin and spoke up.

“Master Hunter Kei.”

Sungjin looked up at him as he asked,

“Hrm? What is it?”

“I... Heard that you had ‘Chosen Ones’... Is that true?”

Sungjin neither denied nor acknowledged it. This was because he felt that it would be troublesome if he said that he did, but it was difficult to lie about it since the number of hunters using the ‘Chosen One’ title was quite high. Instead of answering the question, Sungjin countered, “... Why do you want to know that?”

“No, it’s just... I wanted to know if it was possible for you to choose me.”

Sungjin scratched his head. In the future that Sungjin had seen yesterday, this person had not been one of his allies. Furthermore, there were other reasons for this. The hunter was superb with the halberd, but he was somewhat excessively aggressive so he did not harmonize well with his teammates. Sungjin told him, “I apologize, but... I... Am no longer choosing people.”

“Excuse me?”

The ‘Terminator’'s disappointed expression was obvious.

“Is that so?”

Not particularly proficient in lying, Sungjin simply nodded silently. He had a total of three vials of Holy Water of Baptism left. He felt sorry, but he could not accept everyone just like that. Sungjin left the hunters and the ‘Terminator’ behind and stood in front of the cave. Then, he looked at the hunters as he said, “I’ll solve it myself, so please do not enter.”

Sungjin then walked into the dark and clammy cave. Inside were strange creatures with the head of an octopus and the body of a

human. When Sungjin entered, they held up eerily glowing staves as they started to stand up one by one. The Operator's warning could be heard.

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

[The 'Mindplayer' Sharox and his progeny have appeared!]

Sungjin took out his sword.

'Let's quickly cut him to pieces... Then wait for the summon of the 'Chosen Ones'.'

However, at that moment, the 'Terminator' held his halberd as he entered the cave without consulting Sungjin.

"Master Hunter Kei! I came to help. Killing the Hidden Boss by yourself is ridic..."

"No, I told you not to come in..."

However, it was already too late. The staff of Sharox the Mindplayer began to shine. The hunter's eyes turned yellow, then he started shouting a bizarre scream.

"Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaa~~~"

Sungjin kneaded his forehead.

'Even though I said not to come in...'

Sharox the Mindplayer would control a hunter's mind and cause him to attack his allies. Sungjin bit down on his lower lip. He could kill the boss by himself, but it would be far more difficult to kill the enemies without hurting the 'Terminator'. Feeling regretful, Sungjin thought to himself, 'I should have told them to not come in more clearly.'

But now that he thought about it, he had a spell that could turn back time.

"Uwaaaaaa!"

The yellow-eyed 'Terminator' began charging towards Sungjin,

but in that moment, Sungjin activated the Ring of the Great Sage and reversed time.

“Time Reversal!”

Everything began to go backwards, until Sungjin returned to the moment before he went into the cave. Sungjin stopped himself from entering the cave, and looked at the ‘Terminator’ standing next to him and said, “I’ll say it one more time, don’t come in. Especially Mister ‘Terminator’.”

At Sungjin’s words, the ‘Terminator’ started.

“I’ve clearly seen your abilities already... Entering the cave won’t let you become a ‘Chosen One’. Do you understand?”

The ‘Terminator’ had no choice but to nod his head. Sungjin once again went into the cave by himself.

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

[The ‘Mindplayer’ Sharox and his progeny have appeared!]

He held up his sword and charged towards the enemies by himself. Thankfully, there was no one interrupting this time.

*

Sungjin stabbed Moon Specter and Blood Vengeance into the sand on the beach and laid down.

Crash sshaaa

The sound of the waves crashing rang in his ears. After clearing the hidden boss, Sungjin attempted to find trolls only to repeatedly hear the Operator notify him, [No applicable dimension available].

Because of this, he just simply laid down on the sunny beach.

‘Are there really none left... Ack, whatever.’

According to the future that he had seen through his ‘Ios’, he would reunite with Hiroaki today. That was, so long as he did not do anything incredibly strange. Due to this, he did not go

anywhere and did nothing but simply lie down like this.

‘If this item that shows you the future is real... Then the future that I saw will happen soon.’

Sungjin did not have to wait long. Roughly ten minutes had passed since he had started sunbathing after killing the hidden boss, and suddenly the Operator’s voice rang out.

[The Chosen One has requested your teleportation. Will you accept?]

‘It’s here.’

Sungjin stood up on the sandy beach, then he said to the Operator, “I’ll go. Teleport me.”

Soon, Franz’s figure could be seen above the cube.

“Kei. There’s a person in my party who said that he had a teacher named Kei?”

As Sungjin listened to Franz’s report, he thought,

‘It’s just as I saw.’

Sungjin teleported to Franz’s dimension. There, Hiroaki smiled brightly as he waved to Sungjin.

“Sensei!”

Chapter 177 – The Chosen Ones (2)

Sungjin grinned widely as he greeted,

“Yo! Hiroaki.”

“Sensei!”

Hiroaki ran towards Sungjin.

“Have you been doing well? I occasionally heard stories about you! The strongest troll-killing hunter, Master Hunter K!”

It seemed that Hiroaki was as lively as he was in the past.

“Ah... Is that so?”

Sungjin gave Hiroaki a once-over and noted that he was covered from head to toe in ornate gear.

‘As expected... He was able to adapt well since he’s rather talented.’

Hiroaki examined Sungjin’s equipment as well.

“Ah! I see that you’re still using that sword!”

Hiroaki exclaimed as he noticed Sungjin’s Moon Specter; he had been in Sungjin’s team back when Sungjin had obtained it in Greysoul Cemetery.

“This is how the rumors went: An incredibly powerful swordsman that wielded a ghost’s sword. Whenever I heard that, I would say, ‘That person is Master Hunter Kei! He’s a hundred times stronger than the other hunters! And I’m that man’s apprentice!’”

‘... So... This guy was the one behind the rumors...’

It seemed that Hiroaki had a part in helping the rumors spread. At that moment, Franz came to them and spoke up,

“Kei. Are the two of you actually in a master-apprentice

relationship? Really?”

‘... No.’

Sungjin denied it in his mind but did not actually say so because Hiroaki had exclaimed loudly,

“Of course!”

“Not that... A Korean and a Japanese? Did you know each other back in reality? Aren’t you from different countries? Isn’t it fundamentally impossible?”

Hiroaki faltered slightly.

“That’s not the case... We became master and apprentice when we participated in the raid together.”

Franz wrinkled his forehead as he said,

“Ehh... Then that means you only met once. To call someone you’ve only seen for a day master before going separate ways... If it’s like that, then I’m more of an apprentice than you. I was in a raid with him... Fought together with him... And even sparred with Kei in the morning.”

‘Spar? Ah... He’s talking about that time when I used Time Reversal...’

In truth, it was closer to an experiment than an actual spar, but Sungjin once again kept his mouth closed. Hiroaki spoke up in surprise,

“A spar? Really?”

Sungjin looked at Franz and nodded slightly.

“I’m saying that’s how it was. I probably learned more than you did.”

“How can this be! Sensei! Me too! Please spar with me! I’ve become stronger after going through raids these past few days!”

Hiroaki unsheathed his sword as if asking Sungjin to spar with

him on the spot.

‘He’s still as energetic as ever...’

Sungjin glanced at the three hunters in the rear. They were staring blankly at the scene of Hiroaki and Franz crowding around Sungjin.

“Wait, before we think about sparring or whatever... Did you guys finish the raid?”

“Ah, we just killed the normal boss and were deciding whether we wanted to look for the hidden boss or not.”

“Really? Then... Well, let’s do the Baptism first.”

“Baptism?”

“Yeah. I can’t spar with you right now... But if you accept the baptism you’ll be able to meet me later. If there’s time, then we can spar.”

“Really? Then, of course!”

Since Hiroaki admired Sungjin and obeyed him, Sungjin was able to recruit Hiroaki easily. He took out a Holy Water of Baptism from his vest and poured it on Hiroaki.

“Baptism.”

Hiroaki’s cube made an announcement.

[You were ‘Chosen’ by someone. Title granted.]

Sungjin smiled when he heard that noise. With this, the future that he had seen yesterday had become reality.

*

“All together! One, two!”

Mahadas and Franz helped lift the table together at Baltren’s signal.

“Heave ho!”

The three men lifted it up and connected it to another table.

“Whew. This should be enough, right?”

“Yeah.”

Having moved the two tables next to each other, the hunters each brought up a chair and seated themselves around it. Sungjin sat at the head of the table as he looked about. Now, there were a total of eight Chosen Ones. Their number had grown to the point that they had to bring together two tables at Ninety Nine Nights in order to be able to sit together.

Clap

Sungjin clapped his hands together once, and the hunters all focused their attention on him. He said to them,

“You’ve all worked hard today as well. Before we begin today’s dinner...”

Sungjin tapered off. The hunters’ focus naturally gravitated towards their newly-arrived member.

“Indeed. All of you have probably noticed, but today we have a new member. Everyone, give him a round of applause.”

Sounds of applause filled Ninety Nine Nights once Sungjin had finished speaking. When the clapping began to die down, Hiroaki stood up and said,

“Thank you for the warm reception.”

Sungjin felt a strong sense of déjà vu. It was exactly the same as what he had seen when he used the blue gem ‘Ios’ last night in the bathroom. With two swords equipped to the waist, Hiroaki politely bowed from his waist as he said,

‘I am truly moved to be reunited with my master, as well as find teammates on top of that.’

Hiroaki’s greeting was exactly the same as he had seen before.

Clap Clap Clap~

The hunters' applause began anew. Sungjin clapped along with them as he thought to himself, 'This part hasn't changed either'. Sungjin moved towards the back and entered the bathroom once again. He took out the star-shaped accessory from his vest and rubbed it a little.

'It's correct to the point of eeriness. This is really... a tool that shows you the future...'

Sungjin held up the accessory as he used its Active Skill once again.

"Starlight."

The star shone brightly and led Sungjin to the future once more. Sungjin first began to count the number of 'Chosen Ones'.

'One, two, three... Seven, and including me, eight.'

The total was still eight. This meant that tomorrow's raid would proceed safely as well. Tomorrow's dinnertime was as harmonious as it could be. Everyone had cheerful expressions as they enjoyed the meal.

'... Looks like there's nothing to worry about. Though it seems like there's no new recruit.'

Sungjin continued to watch the future for a while before returning to the bathroom of the present time. He briefly gazed at the blue gem.

'This item... is literally out of this world...'

It was not a 'Mythological' tier item just for show. The countless 'Legendary' and 'Unique Legendary' items he had equipped on him were all those that were rather valuable, but this item was something that surpassed their level altogether.

'With this, wouldn't you be able to... tell if something would succeed or fail in reality... and then change things as necessary?'

He felt that he would be able to proceed with the raids with ease of mind knowing that the next twenty four hours would play out safely.

‘... It should be enough if I come at this time every day and look at the future. At least, until the raids end.’

Sungjin put away the gem after concluding his thoughts. Afterwards, he turned on the faucet and washed his hands. Though he did not actually do anything while in the bathroom, he did it to pass the time since time did not flow when he gazed into the future. As he washed his hands, Sungjin thought,

‘If things go on like this... It’ll be smooth sailing. These raids will end...’

However, he suddenly recalled what the Darker than Black shop owner had told him.

‘You now have everything you need. You already had the determination, and now you have obtained the power. It’s time for the story to end.’

‘Did he... know that I would end up like this...’

It was unclear if he meant ‘the end of the raids’ when he referred to the ‘ending’ of the story, but as things were, it seemed that Sungjin would be able to clear the raids easily. He was strong to the point that he could not grow stronger, and he had seven similarly strong allies. By filling in the remaining two vacancies, he would be able to complete the scene that he desired: him and the strongest allies, ending the raids. However, despite that, there was something that nagged at his mind. It was the future that Edward had seen in Chapter 20. Sungjin took out ‘Ios – The Revelation of the Stars’ once again and looked at it.

‘Back then... Edward’s expression instantly changed after seeing this... Just what was it that he saw... In Chapter 21...’

He did not know what had happened in the future that Edward

had seen, but it was obvious that it was not something good. If this was not the case, then there was no way Edward would change his mind so suddenly.

‘Did he do that because he saw the party being wiped out... And after seeing that, he decided to wipe out the party himself... In order to send me, who is stronger than him, into the past...’

In any case, he could not relax his vigilance yet since, in the end, Sungjin had not been able to go to Chapter 21 either.

Sungjin looked at the mirror that hung on the bathroom wall and slapped himself once.

‘Let’s do it well, until the very end.’

At that moment, as he was looking at the reflection of his face, the earring that was hanging from his ear came into sight.

The ‘Eye of Jeremiah’ was an item that could read the inner thoughts of a person. When he looked at it, he was suddenly reminded of something else that the Darker than Black shop owner had told him.

‘...There was something that I had received without payment. I must give something in exchange if I receive something... When you have to choose one thing, choose that. The truth is always precious.’

“Unequip”

Sungjin briefly rubbed the earring between his fingers.

‘When I have to choose one thing... Choose this...’

Sungjin could not understand just what those words were supposed to mean. However, according to Sungjin’s experiences with the man, the shop owner was not someone to carelessly say something without reason.

‘In other dimensions, they call me a dealer of information. I will answer the questions that you ask, but I will receive an appropriate

amount in return.’

‘I’m not a dealer of information for no reason. If you pay the price for the questions asked, I’ll give you the correct answers.’

His main occupation was an information merchant, and since he had given Sungjin this information in exchange for a price, the information should have equivalent worth.

“Equip.”

Sungjin equipped the earring as he thought,

‘I don’t know when it will be, but when I need to ‘choose one thing’, I’ll choose this.’

Just before Sungjin finally exited the door, he thought about the shop owner,

‘In any case... Just what is he?’

However, the person that could answer the question was already gone. Furthermore, it was obvious that even if asked, he would answer something along the lines of,

‘I’ll tell you if you give me a hundred million Black Coins.’

‘Is he a god? Or is he a devil?’

However, no matter how he thought about it, Sungjin did not think that he would be able to figure out the answer. He exited the bathroom. Outside, the hunters were boisterously enjoying the meal. Sungjin interjected as he asked,

“Just what were you guys talking about so excitedly?”

Chapter 178 – The Chosen Ones (3)

Sungjin paused from eating the strawberry yogurt that had come out as a dessert and looked at the notes that Dalupin had handed him last night.

‘Information pertaining to the City of Crimson Moon.’

‘Hrm... This was a really strange place...’

This chapter was a particularly bizarre place, even among the twenty or so chapters he had seen. The monsters that would appear in the other chapters were creatures that one could have read about in fairy tales or novels, but this place contained monsters that were completely otherworldly; they would appear and disappear like ghosts from nightmares. They were typically aberrant creatures with incomplete forms.

‘Back then... I recall that we barely cleared it...’

Sungjin had narrowly had cleared the chapter after losing several of his allies the last time.

“The boss is called Tezer...”

‘What was it again...’

Sungjin looked at the information sheet. The name of the boss was ‘Tezer’burunda’bas’.

“Tezer’burunda’bas... How should I put this... It has a freely changing form made of... floating faces of angry spirits that are bunched up like slimes.”

Hiroaki asked,

“It’s made of floating vengeful spirits that are bunched up like slimes?”

“Yeah. That... That’s the only way I can describe it... It’s made of all kinds of vengeful spirits: laughing ones, crying ones, angry

ones...”

Sungjin wanted to describe the boss, but it was not easy to find the proper words. He gave up and listed points that they should pay attention to.

“You’ll understand when you see it. What’s special about this guy is that when a part of its body falls off, it will move independently. However, it can’t be damaged. Only the biggest piece can be wounded, so aim for that.”

The ‘Chosen Ones’ wrote down simple notes or silently nodded their heads as Sungjin spoke. Baltren raised his hand and asked,

“Master Hunter. What about the Hidden Boss?”

Sungjin did not have anything to say about that, since he himself had never encountered the Hidden Boss of this chapter. Sungjin replied truthfully,

“I don’t know either. Since the Hidden Boss is unknown... Be careful. Don’t force yourself to kill it, and if it seems difficult, call me immediately. Understood?”

From Sungjin’s perspective, it would be great if the Chosen Ones could kill the boss and grow in strength by themselves, but it would be a huge loss if someone died while doing so. He had only gathered seven Chosen Ones so far, but the Darker than Black’s shop owner was gone, and Sungjin only had two Holy Water of Baptisms left. Because of this, not one of them could be allowed to die if he wanted to create the party of final ten hunters.

“Then, I hope to see everyone at dinner time in good health.”

“Indeed.”

“See you tonight.”

The hunters separated and returned to their respective dimensions. Sungjin sat alone at the joined tables in Ninety Nine Nights, which Dalupin now left connected together, and gazed

over the empty spots.

‘Well... When I saw the future yesterday, no one had died so... There shouldn’t be anything in particular, but...’

In any case, it was likely that no one would die. That is, so long as Sungjin did not do anything strange that was ‘capable of changing the future’ similar to when Edward had cast spells at his allies’ backs.

‘But more importantly...’

Sungjin took out a Holy Water of Baptism from his vest. There were two remaining. It was now Chapter 17. Until Chapter 21, which Sungjin did not know anything about, only Chapter 18, Ser’corist Prison, Chapter 19, Khadhi Azel Magic University, and Chapter 20, Demon King’s Castle, remained. From these four chapters, he had to select two additional Chosen Ones.

‘But there were only eight people at today’s dinner...’

It meant that the possibility of making a new connection did not exist.

‘Then, for now, I’ll not worry about it and just focus on clearing the raid.’

Sungjin believed that this would not be too difficult to do and finished the remaining yogurt.

*

Late at night, in a medieval city where the streets were lit up by shabby torches, the sound of a metallic object scraping against something could be heard.

Creak... Creak

It was unknown if it was a human or an animal, but the moans of some creature could be heard.

Guuuouuuuu...

Above the clock tower that was located at the center of the city, a crimson, full moon could be seen rising. It was an exotic sight. This place which emanated a terrifying atmosphere was Chapter 17, 'City of Crimson Moon'.

'Last chapter was great since it was on a warm beach... Here, the atmosphere is too...'

Sungjin waited for the other hunters to appear as he complained to himself.

Pew~

The other hunters appeared one by one, and surprisingly, a familiar person came into view. It was the tall, blue-eyed monk, Mahadas.

"Oh!... Mr. Kei. By coincidence, it seems that we will be able to carry out this raid together."

"Indeed, that seems to be the case."

"As I thought... Is this because there are not many people left in the raids anymore?"

"That's a possibility."

Previously, when they had finished Chapter 14, there were about 6700 hunters remaining. Though it was impossible to know the exact number of people remaining, it was likely that there were approximately about 2-3000 hunters alive. As it was a five man raid, there would be about 400 to 600 parties and because of this, it would not be particularly difficult to meet with an acquaintance.

"This is the second time that we've been partied together since that time at the Castle. It's a pleasure, K."

Before his regression, Sungjin had been partied with Mahadas twice as well. Strangely enough, it seemed that he and Mahadas had deep ties to each other.

"Indeed so."

Sungjin looked at the other three hunters, wondering if there was someone from the previous final ten people or a familiar face. There was a black person, a white person, and an Asian person, but they were all people that he had never seen before. But on the contrary, there was someone that recognized him.

“Huh, are you? The Master Hunter? Kei?”

“That’s you, right? Master Hunter. The famous troll hunter!”

A short, but sturdy Asian man with a sharp face approached Sungjin and held out his hand.

“From what I hear, you’re Korean?”

Now that he looked at him, Sungjin could tell that his speech matched the movements of his lips. Seeing that he did not require the automatic translation of the Operator, this person must also be a Korean. Sungjin grasped his hand as he replied,

“Yeah... It’s a pleasure to meet another Korean.”

In truth, he was not particularly glad. This was because Koreans would act rudely to Sungjin since he would tend to be younger than them, even though they were in a raid. However, the man replied,

“Ah, I’m not Korean.”

‘Eh?’

Sungjin tilted his head.

‘Huh? Is he Chinese? Does he just know how to speak Korean?’

However, unexpectedly, the man said,

“I’m from the North.”

He was a North Korean.

“Ah...”

A North Korean. It was his first time seeing one in both this current raid and the previous one.

“Still, it’s nice to meet someone of the same ethnicity. Why did all of this madness began...”

When he considered it, he felt that it would not be difficult for North Koreans to adapt to the raid. Because North Korean males were people who had to serve for nearly ten years in the army, they would find it easier to adapt into circumstances as difficult as these.

‘Though I’m worried about cultural differences...but if he is good then maybe he can join...’

However, in the preview that he had of tonight’s dinner, the man was not there. Sungjin wondered why this was the case, but the answer was soon made clear.

“You’re a North Korean?”

The white person who was behind him interjected.

“I’m supposed to depend and fight alongside a terrorist... this is a problem.”

At that, one of the North Korean man’s eyebrows shot up high.

“Terrorist? What are you implying?”

As the voices of the two people got louder, the black person alarmingly said,

“Woah, woah. Hey there, let’s not fight. Did both of you forget that we have to fight for our lives soon?”

Despite the black man’s attempts, the two bared their teeth at each other as if they were about to duke it out. Sungjin glanced at the Caucasian.

‘Does he think that all North Koreans are terrorists... No, even if he thought such things, he should not have said it out loud.’

Having started a fight with another person even before the raid had started, this person was automatically disqualified.

‘It’s amazing that he was able to make it this far...’

The fight between the two was stopped when the monk Mahadas stepped in between them.

“The two of you, please calm your minds and temporarily put away your anger.”

A blue-eyed monk. Whether it was because of his unique appearance or his calm voice, the two strangely settled down when they heard Mahadas’ words.

“No, I wasn’t... Trying to...”

“A monk, here...”

The North Korean scratched his head and turned around. Then, he matched gazes with Sungjin before saying,

“Haa, this is why I normally don’t say where I’m from... I made a mistake since I met someone of the same ethnicity.”

On another thought, the man was a bit pitiable. Being considered a terrorist just because he had said his country of origin. It was also possible that something like this had happened more than once before as well since North Korea was seen poorly by the rest of the world. Sungjin looked at him as he thought,

‘Hrm.. Even if his skill is good, it might be difficult to take him with us...’

Sungjin also had to consider the relationships between his allies. When he now considered the previous final ten, the Muslim-hating Illich was always in a conflict with Mustafa, and Ryushin, who looked down on Japanese people, had problems with Shunsuke.

‘Though it doesn’t really matter to me if he’s from North Korea...’

Although Sungjin himself, as a South Korean, did not have any particular feelings about it, he did not know whether the American Baltren, or the European Nada and Franz would be averse to the

guy. If they thought like that, then there was nothing he could do about it.

‘Is that why there’s only eight people at tonight’s dinner... Whew, whatever. Let’s just finish the raid quickly.’

[The raid will begin 10 seconds. 10, 9, 8...]

Sungjin took out his sword as he contemplated about the matter. Since Mahadas was here as well, this raid was bound to be especially easy.

Author’s Note

Though it’s difficult since my ability to read (English) is not so good, I am reading everyone’s comments.

I took the idea for Blood Vengeance from the sword Chikage from the Playstation game Bloodborne. While the special ability and the lore is different, the idea of a sword whose medium is blood left a profound impression on me.

Artemio, Moon Specter, and Ariane are completely original swords.

The exiled Dark Elf Calian, the owner of Artemio, is, of course, me paying homage to Drizzt Do’urden (from Dungeons and Dragons). When I saw him, I knew that I wanted to write about a protagonist that dual wields swords.

I got the name ‘Sungjin’ from the classic Korean work, ‘The Cloud Dream of the Nine’. The name ‘Sungjin’ is typically a Buddhist name, and the world of novels is something that exists only in our imagination, so I named him with the hope that the readers will discover their purpose in life. (Translator believes the Author means: 省 Sung, as in ‘To search’, and 眞 Jin, as in ‘Truth’).

I got the inspiration for Baltren from the former kickboxer and K-1 fighter Jerome Le Banner, though he’s originally a French person.

I got 'Hiraoki' from the samurai Hiroaki from the manga Blade of the Immortal. I consider it as one of the top 10 mangas that I've read in my life.

Illich is the superior of the Russian Special Forces Member, Igor. A small hint of this can be seen from their conversations. I did not have any intention of purposefully making a Russian person into a villain. It was simply that such things were famous amongst the Spetsnaz. I anthropomorphized the Special Forces into characters, but it unintentionally depicted a country in a villainous light. I do not have any particular reason to dislike Russia.

I wanted to include many more usages of the White Coin, but could not do so because I felt that the work would become excessively complicated.

The Red Dragon Ariane is from a divine bloodline. She could be seen in the worlds of my other works.

Not only this, but details on items or information about the chapter (Ariane's mother and grandmother, the person responsible for injecting the count with the blood of the vampire, the one who caused an inferiority complex on the boss of the magician's ivory tower, forbidden magic etc) and others I've included pieces of details are taken from my other works. It will likely take a very long time, but I hope that the English readers will one day encounter them in my other works.

Also, if there's something you're curious about, if you ask in simple English and refrain from using abbreviations or internet slang, then it's possible that I can reply to you directly.

Chapter 179 – The Chosen Ones (4)

Franz puckered his lips and frowned. It was because he was before a semi transparent octopus-like monster that could rotate its head 360 degrees that was undulating as it was crawling about. Actually the description ‘crawling about’ was still a bit lacking. It would be more accurate to describe its motion as dividing its body in half and transfer its body mass from the bigger chunk to the smaller chunk. Seeing such a bizarre creature evaporated Franz’s desire to fight.

“Ugh... just what is that?”

But then the person standing by his side stepped forward and replied.

“Does it matter whatever that is? We just need to kill it.”

Franz glanced at the speaker. The one standing in this dim lighted place with shining long straight hair was none other than Serin. Perhaps due to the low number of surviving hunters, Franz and Serin ended up in the same party. While Franz was unable to put much strength into his sword, Serin had already nocked an arrow into her bow. Franz saw her and thought,

‘Wow this lady...she’s harder than she looks.’

He had only met her during dinner they shared together, so until now he always had an image of her being an introvert. But now that they stood upon the battlefield, she had a completely different atmosphere about her.

“Let us begin.”

She had spoken with the sharpest of tones. The other Hunters began the preparations to fight at her words.

“Whew...”

Franz took a deep breath and lifted up his greatsword. And at

that moment, Serin's arrow sailed through the air and

‘Pewsht!’

“Creeeeeeiauehhee!”

The monster who was pierced by the arrow let out eerie rusty-machine-like sounds as it made its way toward the hunters.

‘How grotesque’

Franz thought to himself as he picked up his greatsword and ran toward the monster.

*

Nada who had been walking along with the other hunters in the narrow alleyway stopped when she saw something resembling a white pillar at the other end.

“What is that...”

Upon closer inspection it was a very tall person. No, it had the outer appearance of a human being. It had a long body and extended face, it had no eyes or nose, and only its mouth was opening and closing. Finally, a hair as long as the creature lay around its feet. Nada who noticed this bizarre aberration couldn't help but freeze in place.

“Whoa... what is that?”

Nada had fought against countless monsters until now, but it was the first time she had come across such a disgusting lifeform. And, the boy who was standing next to her, Hiroaki, stepped forward and said,

“That thing... it looks like one of the yokai from ancient Japanese legends.”

Nada stared at him. Luckily, she had been paired up with another ‘Chosen One’. Nada frowned as she replied.

“Japanese Yokai?”

Hiroaki grinned and drew his Katana confidentially.

“Why? Are you scared Onee san? Then please wait there. I will go and take care of that alone.”

Nada, honestly, wanted to just stay where she was. But it irritated her ego to hear such words from a boy younger than herself.

“What? Did anyone say they’re scared?”

She drew her two daggers. But her feet wouldn’t move as resolutely as normal. Nada’s brows were furrowed as she thought to herself.

‘Damn it, I want this chapter to be over already.’

*

While the other hunters were in progress through this frightening chapter, Sungjin was able to move forward quickly and was already facing off against the Boss Monster. Because Sungjin had been here before he was able to make good time clearing through the raid, but this party was not without its share of problems.

“Hey, Terrorist! Go block that thing flying from its right hand!”

“Who are you calling a Terrorist?! You Big Nose Yankee!”*

It was because of two people who were busy arguing over their places of birth. Boss Monster Tezer’burunda’bas was capable of freely changing its form and move so the argument was proving to be bit of a critical flaw.

“Ack!”

A fist made of a bundle of spirits landed a hit on the ‘Big Nose Yankee’ flinging him away and

“Ahh!”

the ‘Terrorist’ was bitten by the teeth that appeared in the

abdomen of the monster. Sungjin frowned at the sight and lifted up his swords.

‘These people are no good as I thought. Let’s finish it. Moon Specter, Besgoro.’

‘Yes Master.’

‘Let’s do it.’

Just like he had done in the previous chapter, he watched the other hunters fight for a moment before beginning to fight for real. And ten seconds later, Tezer’burunda’bas who was sliced apart all over, “Criieeeee~” let out hair raising death throes before it collapsed to a single point and then vanished like smoke.

[Boss Monster Tezer’burunda’bas Cleared!]

Sungjin put away his two swords as he listened to the voice of the Operator. With the exception of Mahadas, the other hunters were standing with their mouths open. Since this was not the first time, Sungjin was able to reply coolly.

“I will be doing all of the hunting from this point forward. The rest of you, please keep yourselves safe. Understood?”

Although the hunters here had relatively rough personalities, they were all like obedient sheep at the face of Sungjin’s overwhelming performance and simply nodded. Sungjin began to think hard about what to do next as he looked at them. There were no comrades to be found this chapter. In that case, it was better to kill the hidden boss quickly and get the hunters a Legendary Item or even a bit more Black Coins.

‘Hmm... Franz said he needs a mantle... and Serin was hoping to be able to change out her boots... If I get a good Legendary Item I should get it to them. And if there’s nothing good today then I could always buy from the Black Market...’

Sungjin’s equipments were mostly gathered already and he had nowhere to spend his Black Coins once the Elixirs were no longer

available. It was better for him to yield his things for the other hunters. Although the number of items available and their prices had shrunk due to the decrease in the number of Hunters, it was still possible to purchase Legendary Class Items for coins.

‘Problem here is that I don’t know where the Hidden Boss is located at.’

Sungjin glanced at Mahadas.

‘Well, Venerable Monk Mahadas is here as well... there shouldn’t be anything happening.’

Sungjin concluded his thoughts and immediately said to the Operator.

“Operator, I’ll use the Treasure Hunter Skill.”

*

“Uryah!”

Franz swung his greatsword splitting Tezer’burunda’bas’ body which was followed by a quick successive volley of arrows that flew and pierced the open body.

‘Pew pew pew!’

Before Franz could swing his sword once more, its body shrunk and disappeared.

[Boss monster ‘Tezer’burunda’bas’ Cleared!]

“Whew~”

Franz looked back at the source of the arrows. Serin had already stowed her bow away on her back.

‘Man, unlike what her looks would suggest, she’s really feisty...’

“Everyone, you did great.”

“Good job.”

As the hunters were congratulating each other, Franz brought up

the Hidden Boss.

“How about it? We seem to work pretty well together, do you guys want to go kill the Hidden Boss?”

The hunters hesitated.

“Well... As you said, it's true that we work well together, but... Do we really have to do it?”

“He's right... The last time I tried to kill the Hidden Boss, I lost three of my allies. After that, I'm...”

“Hrm... The rewards are good though...”

Their reactions were not particularly strange. This was because Hidden Bosses were only good if you could kill them. If you could not, then it would become your guide to river Styx. However, Franz wanted to kill the Hidden Boss in spite of this.

‘I'm saying that's how it was. I probably learned more than you did.’

‘How can this be! Sensei! Me too! Please spar with me! I've become stronger after going through raids these past few days!’

Since having met the Japanese swordsman Hiroaki, his desire to grow stronger had somehow increased.

‘Hrm. But still, the one who Master Hunter had recognized for skill is me.’

Franz looked toward Serin as he asked,

“What do you think, Miss Serin? Let's go kill it. We ought to get stronger so we can be of help to Kei, right?”

However, even Serin was not particularly in favor of it.

“However... Oppa... No, Kei, had said that we shouldn't recklessly put ourselves at risk.”

“All five members are still alive... And there's even two Chosen Ones here, Miss Serin and I. Why are you so worried?”

Serin stared at him for a moment, then nodded her head.

“Indeed. If it’s the two of us... It shouldn’t be too dangerous.”

“Great. Since Miss Serin agreed...”

Franz turned his head to the other three and asked,

“How about it? Going to kill the Hidden Boss. The beautiful archer lady and I... the two of us we’ll pull our weight, so how about going...?”

The other three hunters hesitated like before, but ended up accepting since they had witnessed Serin and Franz’s abilities.

“Ok.”

“Let’s do it.”

“Then, is there someone with the Treasure Hunter title here...?”

There was always at least one among the hunters who’ve survived until now. As expected, one of the hunters raised his hand.

“I have it.”

“Then, shall we listen to the hint?”

He nodded his head and spoke to his cube.

“Operator, I’ll use the ability of the Treasure Hunter. Give me the hint related to the Hidden Boss.”

Soon, the Operator told them the information regarding the Hidden Boss.

[In the unfathomably long eons ticking by]

[There be a devil slumbering through the ages]

[It be having nightmares again and again]

[If she be found and the master of the dreams is awoken]

[then light will come]

[and all the nightmares will be extinguished]

[But beware]

[Nightmare or sweet dreams]

[Danger lurks nonetheless]

“Hrm?”

As expected, he couldn't completely grasp it by listening to it only once. The five hunters again clustered around the Operator's Cube.

“Can you say it one more time?”

Note: North Koreans call Americans as 코쟁이 (nosed thing) as an insult. They also call them yankee, which is an insult in many countries. Wasn't sure how to make it sound like a genuine insult so I just said big nose yankee rather than nosed thing yankee.

Chapter 180 – The Chosen Ones (5)

During dinner time at Ninety Nine Nights, all of the Chosen Ones gathered around and brought their glasses of champagne together in a toast.

“A toast! To our victory!”

“Cheers!”

The Chosen Ones raised their glasses and emptied them to the last drop. Then suddenly, Serin approached Sungjin and whispered into his ear.

“Oppa there is something I want to discuss with you alone... could you please come to the second floor with me?”

Having finished speaking, Serin went up to the room on the second floor first. Sungjin watched her leave with a blank stare, then headed after her towards the second floor without letting the other hunters know. However, as he was walking up the stairs, he heard an echo, as if someone was whispering into his ear.

“... up.”

Sungjin looked behind him. The hunters were boisterously dining as usual.

‘Was it just my imagination?’

Sungjin looked at them and tilted his head for a moment, before once more climbing up to the second floor. Though Ninety Nine Nights had several rooms on each floor, Sungjin was quickly able to find out which room Serin was waiting in, as only one of the rooms had its door slightly ajar. Sungjin opened the door and went inside.

“What was it that you wanted to say?”

Serin was standing at the opened window, gazing at the moonlight. However, she was not wearing her usual outfit. She

had forgone the leather vest that she typically wore for a blouse so thin that it was slightly see through.

“You... What’s this?”

While Sungjin was flustered, Serin took off her blouse. All that she was left wearing were a pair of elaborately patterned black brassiere and underwear. In contrast to her dark underwear, the white tone of her skin shone alluringly in the moonlight. The fit physique of an athlete was completely exposed. While Sungjin was frozen and unable to move, Serin approached him and whispered into his ear.

“Oppa...”

Her hot breath stimulated Sungjin’s ear. Sungjin laid her down on the bed. Serin rolled across the bed once like a feline and her firm breasts trembled atop her long black hair, tempting Sungjin. Sungjin stepped forward and grabbed her breasts.

“Ahh...”

Serin let out a groan. It was unclear if it was in pain or in pleasure. And then, Sungjin took out Moon Specter and stabbed it into her stomach in the blink of an eye.

“Urk!”

Serin spat out blood from her mouth as her eyes opened wide. Sungjin then took out Blood Vengeance and beheaded her.

‘Splurt~’

Blood sprayed all over the bedroom. Sungjin stared at the decapitated head. Even after it had been completely separated from her body and rolled around on the floor several times, it stared back at Sungjin and asked,

“How did you know?”

Sungjin flung the blood off of his sword as he normally did, then said,

“Mahadas is an incredibly dedicated monk. In the dozen or so times I’ve dined with him, he has never touched meat or alcohol. But to suddenly drink champagne? You shouldn’t have included him when we were doing the toast.”

Serin, no, the face of whatever that took form of Serin warped in anger.

“Kuh...”

At the same time, the view of Ninety Nine nights disappeared from his sight like a mirage and Moon Specter’s voice could be heard.

‘Master! Please wake up!’

It was then that Sungjin realized that the echo-like voice he had heard back while he was climbing the stairs belonged to Moon Specter. Sungjin said briefly,

“I’m awake.”

“... gather! Protection of Light!”

Mahadas, who had been casting Light Magic on Sungjin, looked up at him and said,

“Ah, you’re awake Mister Kei.”

Sungjin quickly recalled what had happened until just now.

*

They followed up on the hint given by the line, ‘In the unfathomably long eons ticking by’. In their search, they came across a bed inside the clock tower. The bed inside the room looked out of place.

“What’s... This?”

When Sungjin approached the bed with the other hunters, the Operator cried out,

[Warning! Hidden Boss]

[‘Master of the Dreams’ Beatrice has appeared!]

Sungjin took out and held up his two swords. However, at that moment, he suddenly thought,

And promptly lost all recollection of what was happening.

The next scene that he saw, was everyone holding a glass of champagne in their hands as they shouted,

‘Cheers~’

*

Sungjin asked Mahadas,

“Mahadas, how long have I been unconscious?”

“About five seconds.”

What a relief. It seems that time inside the dream had flown more quickly. Sungjin quickly looked towards the other hunters. The other three hunters were engaged in combat with a Succubus that had horns growing from its head. Thankfully, that illusion had only affected one person and the other hunters had yet to fall to it.

‘At worst... I could have ended up killing a teammate.’

Sungjin had been too relaxed to a fault as of late due to the fact that the raids were much easier than his skill level.

‘Woosh’

Sungjin pulled out his two swords as he ran towards the succubus that had bewitched him.

‘In any case, this place feels really disgusting...’

*

[Hidden Boss, ‘Master of the Dreams, Beatrice’ Cleared.]

[Raid 100% complete.]

[Beginning reward distribution.]

Sungjin received the rewards in silence. What came out were a few Legendary items and Black Coins.

‘Hrm... This... I should give this to Mustafa...’

‘This seems like Nada’s style... I should show it to her and ask if she needs it.’

For now, Sungjin put away the items that he had received from the reward distribution. Since the raid was 100% complete, there were no more monsters. He left the hunters and went to a corner to attempt to use the Trollseeker Marbles. When he glanced back, the man from North Korea was shaking hands with the Caucasian.

“Good job out there.”

“Thanks. Sorry about all that at the start.”

Sungjin felt that any two men, regardless of the circumstances, would end up reconciling like them if they had fought through life-threatening situations together. He entered the corner and used a Trollseeker Marble. However, the Operator would only repeat the same message.

[No applicable dimension available]

Well, the number of hunters had decreased to the point where you could actually count them by hand. Many trolls had died because of Sungjin, and those people who had trolled secretly could no longer do so as the hunters began to grow acquainted with one another.

‘Then what should I do during the remaining time... Are the other hunters doing well?’

As Sungjin thought of the other hunters, he suddenly recalled the temptation that he had just experienced.

‘I did say that they shouldn’t attempt the Hidden Boss forcefully, but... Things could be... A bit dangerous?’

Those whom he did not have to worry about were Mahadas the

monk, and Mustafa, who was self-disciplined. As for the rest – Franz, Hiroaki, or Baltren – it was possible for them to fall into a dangerous situation.

‘If someone calls... I might have to leave immediately...’

Having come to this conclusion, Sungjin waited for a bit. And just as he had thought, a few minutes after he had killed the Hidden Boss, the Operator called out.

[The Chosen One Requested your teleportation.]

“Show me.”

Soon, a Chosen One’s face appeared above the Cube. It was the face of Serin, who had seduced him just a moment ago.

“Cough, cough...”

Sungjin let out a few dry coughs. Serin shouted urgently,

“Oppa, come quickly! Right now, Franz is!”

“Okay, I’m on my way.”

Sungjin immediately switched dimensions and entered the dimension that Serin was in.

“Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

The hand of one of the hunters was rotting away due to the Succubus’s black magic.

“Hiyah!”

Serin desperately shot out a few arrows, but the Succubus turned into a bat before splitting into several pieces as she dodged the arrow.

“Ohohohoho!”

Sungjin took out his two swords. Because he had just killed her, Sungjin knew in detail what he needed to do. He looked around. Nearby, Franz’s figure could be seen lying on top of the bed, displaying an unsightly appearance as he stretched out both hands

into the air with his tongue sticking out.

“Heh, heh. Nada... Miss Nada...”

Sungjin rolled his eyes, then ran towards where the bats were gathering.

*

“Pig.”

Serin looked at Franz with contempt.

“No, wait, that’s not...”

Franz attempted to somehow justify himself, but Serin simply turned her head away and distanced herself from Franz. Franz hung his head with his greatsword in his grasp as if he were in despair. Sungjin watched Franz with a pitying expression. As someone who had also experienced that very illusion, he understood. Still, he couldn’t openly defend Franz in front of Serin. However, at that moment, Serin called out to Sungjin.

“Oppa, please come here.”

“Hrm?... Oh... Why?”

Sungjin slightly stammered as he replied to her, the memory of the excessive illusion was still fresh in his mind. Serin gestured to him as she said,

“There’s something I want to say, so come here.”

For some reason, her lines were similar to what he had heard in the illusion. Sungjin wrinkled his forehead slightly as he approached her. Once he came closer, she suddenly leaned in and whispered into his ear,

“Oppa, do you...”

It was far too similar to what had happened in the illusion.

“Mmm...”

However, the ending part of her question was different.

“Back then, Mister Franz called out a lot for Miss Nada while he was lost in the illusion... Do you think... That Mister Franz likes Miss Nada?”

Sungjin took a step away from her as he nodded his head.

“Ah, well... That’s... That’s probably the case...”

However, at that moment, a thought came to Serin and she asked,

“Oppa. Did you, as well, get caught? In that?”

While Sungjin was having difficulty deciding how to reply, a message from the Operator rang out once more.

[The Chosen One Requested your teleportation.]

Sungjin turned his head towards the Operator. Nada’s figure appeared and said to Sungjin,

“Hey Sungjin, come here quickly. Our teenaged swordsman has completely lost it and is looking for some teacher named Meguri or something.”

It was just in time. Sungjin left a quick sentence to Serin and headed towards Nada’s dimension.

“I’ll check it out.”

Author’s Note:

Though I don’t know if it properly hit home for the English readers, but for me, as a Korean, the recent conferences between North and South Korea are incredibly significant to me. One of the main points about Master Hunter K is how people from all nationalities pool their strengths together to overcome hardships. I took a leaf from the recent conference and added in someone of North Korea nationality to show that, though there may be a conflict between each other, it is possible to resolve that conflict.

Although I have never actually written erotic pieces in earnest, I

am aware that, on occasion, it can have an incredibly strong appeal to readers. However, as Master Hunter K is a novel aimed at young teenagers... Nothing more serious than this will appear...